University of Alberta

'Sitting in the Second Pew':
An Hermeneutical Phenomenological Inquiry into Children's Experiences of the House of the Church

by

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Abstract

This dissertation explored the experiences of children of one aspect of sacred place and space, namely the built environment of the church termed "the house of the church." The context for the research was rural and small-town Nova Scotia in the religious denomination of the researcher, the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches.

Hermeneutical phenomenology was chosen as the framework for this study. Although religion concerns itself with that which is ineffable, it also comprises a way of being in the way in the world. This form of inquiry mandated a way of being that was particularly important in interacting with children, characterised by thoughtfulness and mindfulness.

The study began with an exploration of the concepts of sacred place and space, The horizon of meaning of the community being researched was formed by the Judaeo-Christian canon and tradition in general, and the Canadian Maritime free church tradition in particular. Using Robert Webber's principles of the design of worship space and Thomas Barrie's principles of meaning of sacred architecture, a rubric through which to consider worship space was developed.

The approach to children's spirituality that informing this study is based on the pedagogical tradition of Montessori, Cavalletti, Berryman and Stewart, and the recent work of Hay and Nye. This understanding of the spirit of the child values a religious way of knowing that is non-Cartesian and non-developmentalist, favouring a more wholistic understanding that equal values the affective and cognitive domains. Using the four lifeworld existentials of relationality, corporeality, temporality and spatiality as a

framework, children's lived experiences of the constructed environment of the church within a particular tradition of Christianity in Maritime Canada were explored.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Siegfried (1920–2005) and Margaret (Wiebe) Janzen (1922–), both of whom sacrificed for their children, far above and beyond parental duty.

Acknowledgements

As in life, so in dissertations – the individual is the product of experiences and relationships. Inspiration and information for this study have come from many and often unexpected quarters, so it becomes futile to acknowledge all those who have contributed to it. I am exceedingly grateful to all who shared a part in this particular academic endeavour, whether through their advise, professional expertise or loving encouragement.

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Finally, I would like to thank all those individuals who freely and honestly shared their experiences of the house of the church with me. Ethical considerations prevent me from naming you, but each one of you added your own distinctive thread to the tapestry that constitutes this study. I was especially blessed by my conversations with the children who helped me see familiar and sacred places again with fresh eyes. Surely, "a little child shall lead them."

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Last year on Maundy Thursday, I attended a Tenebrae service at the Manning Memorial Chapel of Acadia University. This chapel was built in a traditional New England colonial style, its white, austere interior dramatically relieved by three narrow and unusual stained-glass chancel windows which glow gold and silver in evening light. For the Tenebrae service, the chapel was lit only with candles which cast long shadows on the tall white walls.

About ten minutes before the service began, a young couple with their two-and-a-half-year-old daughter sat down in the pew directly behind me. Although I could hear a few soft murmurs, I experienced no distraction in my Lenten meditations. As the service began, I ventured a peek over my shoulder. The little girl was standing on the pew, encircled by her father's arm, her wide eyes absorbing everything. Throughout the solemn, hour-long service, she carried on the occasional whispered conversation with her father and moved softly between her mother and father, but created none of the noise or disruption one would expect of a typical two-year-old. After the service, I talked with her parents – no, the child was not used to such services; the family attended a small, unsophisticated rural church with a simple order of service; yes, their daughter had been hushed and attentive from the moment they had entered the chapel.

What impressions have been formed in such a young person? Will this memory lurk in the recesses of the heart and mind to subtly shape an understanding of the Holy? What is the import of this early childhood experience?

Such experiences and questions have intrigued me for some time. Deeply involved with children's religious education in both volunteer and professional capacities for the past 35 years, I have become increasingly uneasy over the nature of the educational programs and activities developed for children and youth within my own faith tradition (Protestant Christianity). Many programs are designed to captivate, entertain and occupy children in the effort to teach the tenets of the faith. Yet in my experience, the behaviours and attitudes of children in a church setting generally stand in stark contrast to the response of the two-year-old in the opening story.

I recognised my unarticulated unease in an article by Jardine, LaGrange and Everest, in which they comment,

> However, in many elementary school classrooms (and so much of the work done in faculties of education) [and in religious settings, I would add], there are often let loose rushes of thin, restless activities no one of which warrants much attention or work.... What is lost in many efforts in curriculum integration is precisely the *topography* — the *ecos,* the place — of any particular thing... [What educators must face] is a *serious, immediate, ecological obligation,* to treat things that come to meet us with integrity, to heal the ways that things have become fragmented and displaced and unsettled and dispersed into the ethers of good-hearted but ecologically suspect Internet exchanges (Jardine, LaGrange and Everest, 1998, p. 124).

While many Christian children's programs do promote the building of caring relationships in all facets of life – a mitigating factor against the thinness of the activities – surely there is room for improvement.

In another corner of my life, one of my passions is art in its many manifestations. Within the general domain of creative expression, I am especially interested in architecture, particularly historical and religious architecture. Two degrees in history, growing up in one of the oldest settled areas of Canada (Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley), and living in a house that was built in 1802, have informed and nurtured my

interest. I am intrigued with the notion of beauty and its contribution to the quality of life, and with human constructs of beauty especially in the constructed environment. Over my lifetime, I have become increasingly uneasy and even disturbed by the lack of attention to the aesthetic environment for worship in my particular religious tradition. In regard to my disquiet, I have frequently mused as to whether it is essentially a trivial and 'unspiritual' concern or whether beauty is a legitimate component of our understanding of the divine.

Within my religious tradition, worship and pedagogy are in a state of flux as some churches cling to traditional practices in the face of constant and bewildering change in life around them while others experiment with new expressions and approaches in order to meet contemporary tastes and needs. This ambiguity is evidenced particularly in the construction of new church buildings: spaces are intentionally designed to be "multi-use" in order to accommodate diverse approaches or possible future trends. Driven mainly by the high cost of construction, worship spaces are often sterile or bland to accommodate both Sunday-morning worship and business meetings or community suppers; classrooms are most often small, leading ironically to an inflexibility in educational approaches and models.

Some years ago, these interests and concerns converged during a presentation on church architecture, during which the presenter declaimed, "When the preacher says one thing, and the building says another, the building always wins!" Although this seemed an extreme statement, it provided a catalyst for reflection. How do children experience the buildings in which they worship and learn? Does their experience with the built

environment influence their spiritual formation? Would an understanding of children's experiences carry implications for our approach to religious education?

It is a sad, even deplorable, reality that those with little power generally have little significant input into the factors that affect their lives. This is certainly true of children, who occupy an ambivalent position in North American society. While increasingly, children are the target of an exploding marketing effort by the advertising and merchandising industry (Schor, 2004), most of the decisions affecting children are made by adults. On one hand, many households revolve around schedules that are intended to keep children busy to such an extent that psychologists are seeing children stressed to illness by over-hurried lives (Elkind, 2001, 2007; Crain, 2003; AAP, 2006). On the other hand, the institutions that house and occupy children – home, school, recreational facility, religious centre – are designed by adults who may have children's best interests at heart, but who generally base their decisions on ideas of what is economically viable and practically feasible rather than on what is best for the children.

Extraordinary individuals have advocated passionately for the health and well-being of children throughout past centuries. Their ranks include Comenius, the seventeenth-century Czech educator; Pestalozzi, the eighteenth-century Swiss educator; the nineteenth-century reformers who sought to improve the deplorable conditions of working children; and Montessori, the early twentieth-century physician and educator. These visionaries engaged children in their daily lives and sought to provide opportunities for them, based on the observations rising from personal interactions.

Specialists in the field of childhood studies remind us of the importance of studying children in context (Graue & Walsh, 1998; Mills & Mills, 2000). Daniel Walsh

decries the tendency of adults to "simply pull an anecdote from here, a little theory from there, and a little 'common sense' from one's experience" to shape our knowledge of children; it is far easier, Walsh claims, to "make it up" instead of to "find it out". Finding it out, however, involves spending prolonged time with children in their natural settings – in classrooms or home or playgrounds (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. xiv). To approach this enterprise with integrity requires us to allow children to speak for themselves – to give children their own voice as we attempt to "find it out." As van Manen notes, "while teachers [as well as other adults in pedagogical relationships with children] have been invited to write their personal stories, the voices that are still silent are those of the children. The heteronomy of responsibility lies at the heart of our relation to the children we encounter, teach, or parent. It refers us to the call this other person, this child, makes on our personal responsibility" (van Manen, 1992, p. 254).

The ecology of the everyday lives of many children in Canadian culture includes a formalised religious component. For such children, religion may be an integrated aspect of their daily lives or only a weekly emphasis or connection. The most recent national statistics date back to 1994, when the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth conducted by Statistics Canada indicated, "Over one-third, 36%, of Canada's children under 12 years of age attended religious services at least once a month, and the majority were weekly participants… Children living in Atlantic Canada had the highest regular attendance rate, 52%" (Jones, 1999, pp. 13-14). Although recent national surveys have documented a decline in regular religious attendance, weekly attendance in Atlantic Canada remains the highest in the nation (Clark & Schellenberg, 2006, p. 5). In my own relatively small denomination (membership of 63,000 in 2005), the average weekly

attendance for Sunday School in the Atlantic Provinces for 2006 was 10,563 (CABC, 2006, p. SM-22); this statistic does not include the mid-week programs which in many areas are more popular and often more widely-attended. While this number includes youth and adults, about 75%, or approximately 7500, would be children under twelve (CABC, 2007).

Childhood specialists routinely ignore the religious component that is part of the everyday lives of many children in North America. In their thorough methodological research guide to studying children in context, Graue and Walsh (1998) make not one mention of any church or church school setting. If we wish to "find out about" the whole life of the child who is involved with a faith community, the religious setting surely must be one of our stopping-places.

The well-known curriculum theorist Joseph Schwab named four commonplaces of any educational endeavour –the teacher, the student, the subject matter and the milieu – with which to critique curriculum (Schwab, 1972). In an integrated view of curriculum, all four commonplaces are equally salient. Within the discipline of Christian education, however, relatively little critical, academic attention has been directed to the domain of milieu. While milieu encompasses the whole social and cultural context in which teaching/learning takes place, I am exploring only one dimension of this context, namely the constructed or built environment – *the place and space* – in which corporate Christian worship and teaching occurs.

Employing Peter Oliva's understanding of curriculum, which is "a plan or program for all experiences which the learner encounters under the direction of the school" (cited in Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1996, p. 26), I contend that one

of the prime learning experiences in religious education occurs when the faith community gathers in corporate worship and education. These events include the intentional or overt curriculum as well as the "hidden" and "null" curriculum. Here I follow Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman (1996) who define null curriculum as that which is not offered or included in the overt curriculum. "The hidden curriculum is the ideological and subliminal message presented within the overt curriculum, as well as a by-product of the null curriculum" (p. 27).

I suggest that the place and space in which worship occurs is part of the hidden curriculum, and as such influences the spiritual formation of those who gather there, echoing Winston Churchill's view, "We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us" (Churchill, 1943). Because my specific interest is in the spiritual life of children, it is their experience of sacred space I wish to explore. As Julia Ellis has noted, "*Place* is increasingly being used as a central idea in research in a number of disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, architecture, literary criticism, history, and religion.... Children's place and space can be understood as a form of curriculum – the lived experience that shapes and enables their growth and learning (Ellis, 2002)."

My research question, then, is, "How do children experience the place and space of the church in the author's religious tradition?"

Sub-questions of the study are:

1. What insights might this study reveal about the nature of children's spirituality?
2. What might we discover about the nature and qualities of religious or sacred space as experienced by children?
3. What implications emerge for the design of religious space for children?

4. How might we access children's voices when creating/designing religious space that children will use?

I am intrigued by all facets of the rich multi-sensory lives of children and by their relationships to the various environments in which they are placed, especially where intentional communication with and about God takes place. At a major exhibition of Auguste Rodin's bronze sculptures, I was captivated by a simple work entitled "The Cathedral." The sculpture is composed of two larger-than-life-size hands (both are right hands) in a prayer-like gesture. The shape and gesture of the hands are reminiscent of the soaring reach of a Gothic cathedral, about which Rodin was passionate. Rodin's sculpture drew me into a sacred space that is created by human hands, but that seems to transcend human limitations. It is a communal space, the two right hands suggesting that more than one individual is engaged in this exercise. The negative space created by the hands invites reflection as much as does the graceful gesture. What happens in this space? More particularly, in reference to my research interest, how do children experience this space?

Figure 1. A. Rodin, The Cathedral. Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation, Electronically retrieved 4 June 2005, http://www.cantorfoundation.org/Rodin/Gallery/rvg61.html l

Chapter Summary

In summary, my foray into the topic of children and their experience of constructed religious place and space began with concurrent interests in sacred architecture and children's spirituality. Over time, my reading led me to deeper consideration of the power of place and space in the human experience. Books such as *Dakota; A Spiritual Geography*, by Kathleen Norris (1993) and *The Geometry of Love*, by Margaret Visser (2000) captivated my imagination. At the same time, as a Christian clergyperson with oversight of children's ministries, I was becoming increasingly concerned about children's spiritual nurture. Due to my unease with current religious education approaches and practices in my own denomination, I began to read in the field of children's spiritual formation and nurture. Gradually my two parallel interests began to converge, and I found myself considering the role of place and space in children's spiritual lives. When I began doctoral studies in the field of religious and moral education, my interests coalesced into a research topic.

A close survey of the literature in my chosen topic revealed a burgeoning interest in sacred place and sacred space, ranging from popular travel guides for diverse pilgrimage routes to academic treatises on the theology or anthropology of sacred sites. A corpus of work on place and space provided the foundation for the more particular study of sacred place and sacred space. Although the general topic of sacred place and space was my initial interest, it proved to be too vast a topic. In an effort to create a manageable research project, I chose to focus on one aspect only of sacred place and space – that is, the constructed environment of the church. While researchers in childhood studies were

beginning to pay some attention to children's experiences of place and space in educational or social settings, I could find no specific study on children's experiences of sacred settings. Given that religious attendance is a regular component of many Canadian children, it seemed worthwhile to explore this dimension of their lives.

I approach this study by first discussing the research framework and methodology – hermeneutical phenomenology – and by describing the context in which the study was conducted. Secondly, I explore the concept of sacred place and space, specifically the constructed environment of the church which Giles names "the house of the church" (2004, p. 87), paying particular attention to the regional distinctives of the setting of the study. Thirdly, I review current approaches to the topic of children's spirituality and present the approach that informs my research. Finally, I present the data of my research and reflect on my conversations with and observations of children as to their experiences of the house of the church.

CHAPTER II: RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Philosophical Framework

As a Christian religious educator with a deep interest in the spiritual life of children, I found that the research methodology that best lent itself to my interests was phenomenological inquiry. The literature on phenomenological inquiry supports this approach. For instance, Max van Manen states in his introduction to this form of research inquiry:

> From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings.... In doing research we question the world's very secrets and intimacies which are constitutive of the world, and which bring the world as world into being for us and in us. Then research is a caring act: we want to know that which is most essential to being. To care is to serve and to share our being with the one we love. (van Manen, 1990, p. 5)

From my spiritual perspective, this aptly describes what I expect of my own research: to gain insight into how people (especially children) experience their faith within their lifeworld, insight which will make my teaching more caring and relevant to others' needs and realities. It was encouraging to discover that the Australian Catholic religious educator, Brendan Hyde, had effectively used hermeneutical phenomenology as a theoretical framework for his work in reflecting, interpreting and gaining insight into the features of children's spirituality (Hyde, 2005a, 2005b).

For the purposes of this study, I identify 'spirituality' or 'spiritual life' as the awareness of the transcendent that children might experience in their everyday, ordinary lives as well as those extra-ordinary states of wonder, awe, and numinousness which may be termed mystical experiences. I use the expression 'spirituality' to encompass both the

affective and the cognitive aspects of the religious. Viewing the spiritual life in a more wholistic sense moves beyond the predominately rational 'knowing about' that has dominated the discussion of children's religious lives over the last century. The broader perspective (developed in Chapter IV), which has been receiving greater attention during the last two decades (Hay, Nye and Murphy, 1996; Hyde, 2004), opens up new opportunities for phenomenological research.

The following two accounts of profound spiritual experiences in early childhood serve as illustrations for this discussion. The first is the reminiscence of a fifty-seven year old woman, and the second is the memory of the French writer, Julian Green, of his fifth or sixth year of life.

> The most profound experience of my life came to me when I was very young — between four and five years old. I am not mistaken in dating this because I remember so clearly both the place where it occurred and the shoes I was wearing at the time.... My mother and I were walking on a stretch of land in Pangbourne Berks, known locally as "the moors." As the sun declined and the slight chill of evening came on, a pearly mist formed over the ground.... Suddenly I seemed to see the mist as a shimmering gossamer tissue and the harebells, appearing here and there, seemed to shine with a brilliant fire. Somehow I understood that this was the living tissue of life itself, in which that which we call consciousness was embedded, appearing here and there as a shining focus of energy in the more diffused whole. In that moment I knew that I had my own special place, as had all other things, animate and so-called inanimate, and that we were all part of this universal tissue which was both fragile yet immensely strong, and utterly good and beneficent. The vision has never left me. It is as clear today as fifty years ago, and with it the same intense feeling of love of the world and the certainty of ultimate good. It gave me then a strong, clear sense of identity which has withstood many vicissitudes, and an infinity with plants, birds, animals, even insects, and people too, which has often been commented upon. Moreover, the whole of this experience has ever since formed a kind of reservoir of strength fed from an unseen source, from which quite suddenly in the midst of the very darkest times a bubble of pure joy rises through it all, and I know that whatever the anguish there is some deep centre in my life which cannot be touched by it. Of course, at the early age of four or five I could not have expressed anything of the experience in the words I have now used, and perhaps the attempt to convey the absorption of myself into the whole, and intensity of meaning, sounds merely over-coloured to the reader. But the point is that, by whatever mysterious

> perception, the whole impression and its total meaning were apprehended in a single instant.(Robinson, 1983, p. 32)
>
> From these years gone by, I retain the memory of a moment of ecstasy such as I have never known since. Should we mention such things or conceal them? At this moment then, I raised my head towards the window, and looked out at the dark sky lit up by a few stars. How can I describe what is beyond the power of words. That moment was perhaps the most important in my life, and I do not know what to say about it. I was alone in a dark room, looking at the sky, and I felt what I can only call an élan of love. I have loved since, but never quite like that, without knowing that I was doing it. Somehow I knew He was there, looking at me and loving me too. How did this thought dawn in my mind? I do not know. I was sure Some One was there, speaking to me without words. With that I have said everything. Why must I write that I never found in any human discourse what I was allowed to feel then, for about ten seconds, when I could hardly put three intelligible words together, and did not realize my own existence? (Armstrong, 1985, p. 3)

These recollections represent the relatively small, but growing, corpus of phenomenological research on the lived experiences of childhood spirituality. Both stories describe moments in the lives of young children that appeared to have had a life-long influence. It is intriguing that both individuals kept their experiences to themselves, Green to the point that he lost the memory for many years. Both Robinson and Armstrong note the inclination of children to keep such profound experiences to themselves until they *might* be prompted them to share them as adults. Many such experiences may remain private memories for life. The nature of childhood secrecy and inwardness is richly explored by van Manen and Levering in *Childhood Secrets* (van Manen & Levering, 1996). Through their work we begin to appreciate the complex thoughts, feelings and experiences that children, for one reason or another, prefer to keep to themselves.

Children's inclinations to suppress, conceal or preserve as private their spiritual experiences have implications for both the children themselves and for the adults who

interact pedagogically with them. Religious understanding can grow out of (or conversely, be thwarted by the lack of) a recognition by individuals of the existence of such spiritual experience within themselves — a recognition which may be validated by the significant others in children's lives. In the absence of an understanding of the forms children's 'natural' spirituality can take, it may be difficult for adults to assist children in learning from their (the children's) own experiences and in growing their inner spiritual lives. If adults have lost the memory of their own childhood spiritual experiences, they may not recognise children's present experiences. I am concerned by this lack of awareness of children's spiritual or inner lives in the pedagogical work of the church and believe, with Hyde (2005a), that phenomenological research holds promise in providing tools with which the religious educator may gain insight into features of children's spirituality.

Phenomenology has a strong philosophical base, but has becomes increasingly complex and diverse in recent decades (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990). In fact, Stewart and Mickunas caution their readers:

> The diversity of points of view held by philosophers working within the phenomenological tradition makes a summary of major tenets difficult, and one should be aware that other descriptions of phenomenology which focus on different areas of common emphasis might also be given. It is not even the case that all phenomenologists would agree that the themes mentioned here are the most important ones.... With these caveats in mind, one can characterize phenomenological philosophy as centering on the following basic themes: a return to the traditional tasks of philosophy, the search for a philosophy without presuppositions, the intentionality of consciousness, and the refusal of the subject-object dichotomy. (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, p. 4)

Although the term "phenomenology" was used by various philosophers in the past (i.e. Lambert, Kant, Hegel), Edmund Husserl's appropriation of the word in the early part of the twentieth century established its meaning for present thought and practice. The

word derives from the Greek word *phainomenon*, meaning "to come to light" or "to appear."

The following principles summarize the core facets of phenomenology as a philosophical approach both to epistemology and to research (drawn mainly from Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, and Moustakas, 1994):

1. Phenomenology focuses on the appearance of things, a return to things just as they are given, removed from what we are told is true in the natural world.

2. Phenomenology is concerned with wholeness, with examining entities from many sides, angles, and perspectives until a unified vision of the essences of a phenomenon or experience is achieved.

3. Phenomenology seeks meaning from appearances and arrives at essences (nature) through intuition (not the problematic intuition often equated with guessing) and reflection on conscious acts of experience, leading to ideas, concepts, judgments and understandings.

4. Phenomenology is committed to descriptions of experiences, not explanations or analyses. Descriptions seek to retain, in vivid and accurate terms, the original texture of things. The essence or nature of an experience has been adequately described in language if the description reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller and deeper manner.

5. Phenomenology is rooted in questions that give a direction and focus to meaning, and in themes that sustain an inquiry, awaken further interest and concern, and account for our passionate involvement with whatever is being experienced.

6. Subject and object are integrated.

7. Intersubjective reality is part of the process, yet every perception begins with my own sense of what an issue or experience is and means.

8. The data of experience, my own thinking, intuiting, reflecting, and judging are regarded as the primary evidences of scientific investigation.

9. The research question that is the focus of and guides an investigation must be carefully constructed, so that the words guide and direct me in the process of seeing, reflecting and knowing.

As van Manen has emphasized, doing phenomenological research is a way of being, not just a technique. Or as Mary Moore states, "It is more an art to be practiced than a theory to be learned" (Moore, 1991, p. 97). One word that characterizes phenomenology is "thoughtfulness," which can be described as mindfulness — a heedful, mindful wondering about the project of life, of living, of what it means to live a life (van Manen, 1990, p. 12). For me, this "thoughtfulness" represents the heart of religious education, certainly Christian religious education, yet ironically is often missing in the flurry and press of creating and administering 'programs,' designed to produce love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

Allied to this concept of 'thoughtfulness' is that of 'presence.' From my experience, an attitude of genuine attentiveness is not only an asset but also essential in working with children who are especially sensitive and intuitive in personal relationships. Adults may feel strongly enough about an issue (for instance, how they experience nursing care in a hospital, as reported in Creswell, 1996) to share their experiences, regardless of how the individuals relate to the researcher. Children, on the other hand,

generally require a climate and a relationship of trust before they are willing to share deeply personal experiences, although as *Childhood Secrets* reminds us, even that may not be enough to encourage them to share. Moustakas, who provides a good model of a phenomenological relationship, relates a poignant example of trust and disclosure.

Norman, a seminar leader, was beginning to establish a pedagogical relationship with Louise, a shy nine-year-old girl, who preferred silence to talk; the two took a trip to a beach, with the ensuing development.

> Louise and I walked on the sand in silence except for the sound of the sea gulls ... I learned that her silence is an outcome of shyness. When we had walked some while, she began to refer to her school experiences and her disappointment in what was being taught, the lack of freedom and time to learn things of value to her. I asked her if school was the only place for learning. I sensed that she was aware of my confidence in her that life itself outside the classroom tapped her ability to learn. She immediately pointed to the beach, sand and water and what could be learned through observation. I asked what she had learned. To my surprise she literally shouted, "Do you really want to know? Sometimes big people don't want to hear what children have to say." I assured her that I was not only interested but had no other interest while with her but to listen and understand her.
>
> She began to open up in a way that I never thought would happen.... Our meetings passed quickly. We wrote in the sand, drew pictures, and watched intently as the waves washed our creations away.
>
> I believe that Louise felt good, free, open, expressive in my presence. I learned to listen, to sense her meanings, to express my interest and valuing of her. I have no doubt that my meetings with her were but a beginning but in itself of value in recognizing and supporting her, her initiative and way of being. She alternated silence and talk and entrusted me with some of the things that mattered most in her life. (Moustakas, 1988, p. 16)

All research with children, regardless of method of inquiry, should be characterized by such sensitivity. As the above example illustrates, cultivating a trusting relationship can result in a deep and significant sharing — and learning.

An integral aspect in 'being present' with another, whether adult or child, is the relinquishment of one's own biases, preconceptions and prejudgements. This step in the

process of phenomenological research is variously described as "bracketing" or "epoche" (from the Greek, meaning to refrain from judgement, to abstain from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things). For the religious researcher, bracketing is a requisite, especially for one who comes from a confessional background and may find personal religious convictions insinuating into one's perceptions.

The suspension of presuppositions demanded by a strict adherence to the discipline of phenomenological research represents a challenge to a study based in a confessional religious setting. However, one has to stand somewhere, and I submit that the integrous approach is to reveal one's convictions, rather than to mask them. Having stated my belief in a loving God, I nevertheless maintain that this stance does not preclude thoughtful observation. Awareness of one's personal biases and preconceptions and a willingness to suspend judgement allows one to see with new eyes.

To increase one's self-awareness, Moustakas recommends that the researcher (who is also a learner) "enter into a process of authentic self-presence, thinking and choosing as a way of discovery and knowing the nature and meaning of significant experiences in identity and selfhood." Some of the methods he suggests to cultivate a reflective self-awareness include: growing quiet and listening; coming to an inward clearing; connecting with a question or issue related to one's own self or another, or to a situation or event; describing the experience; determining the qualities, constituents and themes; considering possible meanings, and arriving at an understanding of the essence of the experience. The rationale for this process of self-awareness is that I first must be attuned to my own being, thinking and choosing before I relate to others' thoughts, understandings and choices (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 62, 63).

Another trait of phenomenological research is that it is discovery-oriented. It wants to find out what a certain phenomenon means and how it is experienced. "So phenomenological research has, as its ultimate aim, the fulfilment of our human nature: to become more fully who we are" (van Manen, 1990, p. 12). This statement has profound theological implications for me, and I am left pondering the following questions. How do my personal religious convictions shape my pedagogical relationships with children? Am I trying to mould children into who I think they should be, or am I allowing them to develop as they have been created? How does my personal belief that the human being is created in the image of God (loving, merciful, creative) influence, in subtle and overt ways, my engagement with the children I am studying? If I "thoughtfully," "mindfully" attempt to discover how they experience their faith, how they feel and think spiritually and religiously, I should be able to engage with them in their journey of becoming who they are, perhaps even contributing to that process.

To return to Julian Green's account: one senses the anguish in his unanswered question, "Why must I write that I never found in any human discourse what I was allowed to feel then...?" To foster a sensitivity to children's spontaneous and interior spiritual lives, to create an environment that encourages their expression and validation, and to build on that reality would surely be to allow and to help them "to become more fully who [they] are." Such an enterprise must be the task of every pedagogical relationship, not least that of the religious educator.

The four existential lifeworlds explicated by van Manen (1997) have proved very useful in shaping a practical framework for this research. These lifeworlds – relationality, corporeality, temporality, spatiality – will be introduced and explored in Chapter V.

Mindful of van Manen's caution about relying solely on technique, there is a definable process in doing phenomenological research. He recommends the following methodological structure:

1. finding a phenomenon of interest and significance
2. investigating experience as lived rather than as conceptualized
3. reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon
4. describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting
5. maintaining a strong pedagogical relation to the phenomenon
6. balancing the research context by considering parts and whole (van Manen, 1990, pp. 30-31).

Moustakas (1994) provides these criteria for "an organized, disciplined and systematic study":

1. discovering a topic and question rooted in autobiographical meanings and values, as well as involving social meanings and significance
2. conducting a comprehensive review of the professional and research literature;
3. constructing a set of criteria to locate appropriate co-researchers
4. providing co-researchers with instructions on the nature and purpose of the investigation, and developing an agreement that includes obtaining informed consent, insuring confidentiality, and delineating the responsibilities of the primary research participant, consistent with ethical principles of research
5. developing a set of questions or topics to guide the interview process
6. conducting and recording a lengthy person-to-person interview that focuses on a bracketed topic and question. A follow-up interview may also be needed

7. organizing and analyzing the data to facilitate development of individual textural and structural descriptions, a composite textural description, and a synthesis of textural and structural meanings and essences (pp. 103-104).

I have included both these outlines by two respected practitioners of phenomenological research, because between them they provide a framework from which the research methodology for this project evolved.

Several issues are of concern or seem problematic for phenomenological research within religious education, not the least of which is the presence of mystery and the unseen. Researching lived experience with young children presents a number of challenges, which, although not insurmountable, do need to be considered with care. Of prime concern is the issue of language. The middle-aged woman quoted at the beginning of this chapter indicated that "at the early age of four or five I could not have expressed anything of the experience in the words I have now used." Though research, such as that by Maria Montessori, Sofia Cavalletti and Edward Robinson, indicates that children of age four years and older have experience of the numinous, of a spiritual nature, of self-revelation, children of primary age and younger do not yet have the language or cognitive capacity to express themselves. Hay, Nye and Murphy (1996) suggest, "An important area for research must be to investigate the form in which such experiences are held by children at the time, before they are able to reflect on them fully, rationally or otherwise" (p. 58). They ask the question, "How, if at all, do children articulate or at least store such memories which are later recalled as spiritually significant? And how many more experiences are forgotten in the absence of any context which allows their expression?" (p. 58). It has been my experience that children are eager to please adults who pay

attention to them, and even young ones who have been exposed to religious training in the home, church or school will answer with conventional 'God-talk.' Hay and Nye (1998) discuss in depth the sense of "the spirituality of children from conventionally believing backgrounds being circumscribed and limited by standardized religious language" (p. 87). This inclination is not limited to children, as Moustakas (1994) points out, for in our society, "we are expected to attend to and repeat what other people think, believe, and say regarding what is true" (p. 62). Karl Rahner, from a Christian perspective, speaks of religions as "conceptual reflections on, and social institutionalisations of our experience of God." He adds that conceptual reflections fail to capture the experience, "just as it is possible to talk about God without being spiritual" (quoted in Hay, Nye and Murphy, 1996, pp. 61, 62).

The challenge of finding words to describe experiences that seem beyond words is shared by people of all ages. The geographer, Ann Buttimer, writes eloquently of the power of place and its tenuous connection to language:

> I'm sure that many of the attitudes I bring to my geography … derive from my childhood experiences of life in Ireland. It is difficult for me to find words to describe what the experience of living in Ireland still means for me. It is a total experience of milieu which is evoked: I recall the feel of the grass on bare feet, the smells and sounds of various seasons, the places and times I meet friends on walks, the daily ebb and flow of milking time, meals, reading and thinking, sleeping and waking. Most of this experience is not consciously processed through my head – which is why **words are so hard to find** – for this place allows head and heart, body and spirit, imagination and will to become harmonious and creative. (quoted in Inge, 2003, p. 15, emphasis mine)

Such an admission from an articulate writer elicits another reflection on the earlier question from Hay, Nye and Murphy. "How if at all, do children articulate or at least store such memories which are later recalled as spiritually significant? And how many more experiences are forgotten in the absence of any context which allows their

expression?" As Buttimer has suggested, perhaps some experiences are beyond verbal expression. In his reflections on the limits and power of language, van Manen (1997) writes about "epistemological silence," which is "the kind of silence we are confronted with when we face the unspeakable" (p. 113). He suggests, however, that when we experience the ineffable in life, "it may be that what remains beyond one person's linguistic competence may nevertheless be put into words by another person," who may be a particularly thoughtful writer, philosopher or poet (p. 113).

Lest we become too discouraged by the perceived limitations of children's linguistic abilities, Cavalletti (1983) has recorded from her extensive work with young children (some as young as three and four), numerous instances when very young children have expressed religious understanding even though they had not been exposed to religious instruction. The following serves as an example:

> Lorenzo (four years old) belonged to a Catholic family, but he had never had any catechetical instruction nor had he received any special care in the religious sense. One day his aunt asked him to do a picture of God. Lorenzo drew on the bottom left-hand side of the page – hence in a secondary position – a human figure with a large head, and then he filled the page with a series of signs in which numbers could be recognized. His aunt asked him the reason for the presence of the numbers, and Lorenzo explained: "Because they are many." Lorenzo had the intuition that God is infinite. (p. 32)

Whether one agrees with Cavalletti's theological interpretation of Lorenzo's drawing or not, it seems apparent that this four-year-old was expressing his understanding of God.

In a similar vein, Hay and Nye (1998) have documented the ability of children to make meaning of their spiritual experiences, "Despite snags like the limitations of language, relative lack of experience and social taboos, it seems that children can provide their own evidence of what their spirituality is like" (p. 112).

Our propensity for classifying and categorising every human experience mitigates against the equally human struggle to give voice to complex and nuanced life events. The American poet, Emily Dickinson (1924), who encountered life's mundane events with an exquisite intensity that rendered them almost too intense for her to bear, wrote,

> My cocoon tightens, colors tease,
> I'm feeling for the air;
> A dim capacity for wings
> Degrades the dress I wear.
>
> A power of butterfly must be
> The aptitude to fly,
> Meadows of majesty concedes
> And easy sweeps of sky.
>
> So I must baffle at the hint
> And cipher at the sign,
> And make much blunder, if at last
> I take the clew divine. (pp. 165-166)

Like the butterfly, we too seem to have "a dim capacity for wings" that struggles against the confines of language, cipher and sign. Given the human limitations of describing experiences that seem either beyond consciousness or too numinous for words, I feel as though I have only discerned a hint of "the clew divine," and trust that I have not made too "much blunder" in my efforts to grasp it. As William Wordsworth cautioned,

> Our meddling intellect
> Misshapes the beauteous forms of things: –
> We murder to dissect. (quoted in Hay and Nye, 1998, p. 137)

The perceived reluctance of children, as well as adults, to acknowledge, describe or discuss spiritual moments is juxtaposed against an accepted reference point for talking about such matters. In mainline Protestantism, defined by modernist, Enlightenment sensibilities, profound spiritual experiences have been suspected of being mere 'emotionalism.' A pervasively sceptical attitude has tended to discourage personal or

public acknowledgement of profound experiences and self-conscious awareness. A reluctance to speak about spiritual matters is evident even in young children, as documented by Nye in her illuminating study of British school children aged six to eleven; she discovered that some children were afraid of "being laughed at or thought stupid or even mad" by both their peers and their families (even religious families) if they talked about their personal sense of the religious in their lives (Hay and Nye, 1998, p. 105).

Even in a denomination such as my own (Canadian Baptist) that stresses personal conversion, there is little sanctioned opportunity, except in highly structured, formalised occasions such as one's baptism, to talk about transformative moments. However, recent scholarship on spirituality suggests that spirituality is an inherent and fundamental quality of what it means to be human (Hay and Nye, 1998) but that repression or discarding of spiritual awareness is a social construction of Western culture (Hay, 2001). The nature of spirituality will be explored more fully in Chapter 4; at this point, I would like to note that social contexts that have discouraged discourse on the subject deemed to be of immense personal importance present a challenge to any researcher who hopes to access memories and experiences that may be viewed as taboo subjects for common conversation.

A corollary to the concern over linguistic limitations is the related issue of memory and recovery of childhood experiences by adults. Although adults are able to provide richer descriptions of early experiences, they also filter their memories through a lifetime of other experiences which have shaped their lifeworld and worldview. Phenomenologists have long wrestled with this issue. Alfred Schutz (1899-1959)

addressed this theme when he "frequently pointed out how one's reconstitution of a past experience in memory varied according to the interests of the *present* from which one remembered the past" (Barber, 2006). Accessing a remembered experience is part of the larger question of whether it is possible to access the pre-conceptual without conceptualizing it. Given the strong impetus to ascribe theological meaning to spiritual experiences from the horizon of one's religious tradition, how one remembers a past religious experience may be profoundly shaped by one's specific catechetical education or more general religious practice. While it is important to be aware of this issue, memories in and of themselves also point to the importance of the past experience in shaping the lifeworld of the individual.

Matthew and Limb (1999) opened their discussion on representation with the question, "Given that there is 'a great deal of difference between the adult who is able to recall rich and memorable experiences of childhood and the young child encountering a place or an environmental experience for the first time. How can we ever step back…? Are adults inevitably to be cast as outsiders able to gain only the most meagre glimpses of childhood?'" Matthew and Limb provided the sensible advice that "partial understanding is better than not attempting to understand and that with care and sensitivity and the use of appropriate methodologies" researchers should be able to get closer to the worlds of children (p. 64).

The work of researchers such as David Ng and Robert Coles bears out the wisdom of Matthew and Limb's advice. In his extensive interviews with children in all stations of life around the world, the eminent Harvard paediatric psychologist Robert Coles modelled a sensitivity and humility which reflected the approach recommended by

Matthew and Limb. Particularly evocative is his *Their Eyes Meeting the World* (1992), which not only detailed his process in eliciting drawings and conversations from his young subjects but also presented his poignant and insightful observations on their significance. This illustrated book, along with his numerous other books detailing interviews with thousands of children, is a testament to the profound ability of children, even at a very young age, to make sense of their own lives and the world around them and to give powerful voice to those insights if given the opportunity.

The lack of a research tradition that considers a broader, wholistic perspective of children's spirituality, including the sensory and affective as well as the cognitive, indicates a need for creative new approaches. It also raises the methodological concern of formulating the appropriate questions so important in phenomenological research. How do we access the responses of children to ordinary and extra-ordinary activities which can act as 'signals of transcendence' without being reduced to conventional God-talk? One suggestion is to tell a story or show a picture and invite children to give their reflections on it; this approach appears to free their imaginations and reflections more than the use of questions, no matter how well-crafted. Reflection through art might be revealing as well, although, again, care needs to be taken in formulating the question in order to preclude a solely cognitive response. For instance, in a recent phenomenographic study, when children were requested to draw a picture of God, the drawings were predominately anthropomorphic; when they were asked to draw their **experience** of God, their art consisted mainly of colourful abstractions, as well as semi-anthropomorphic images (Tamm, 1996, emphasis mine). Tamm's study reinforces the importance of the formulation of the questions in a phenomenological study, especially where children have

been exposed to conventional or traditional religious education. Further experimentation in the quest for questions and situations which elicit genuine sharing of personal meaning-making and lived experience is needed.

From a theological perspective, phenomenology as a philosophical approach raises concern, particularly among those religions which are based on authoritative sacred texts, such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Of chief difficulty would be phenomenology's claim that truth resides in appearance or in that which is perceived. This stance precludes the existence of an objective truth which lies beyond humanity's perception. In her dialogue between process theology and phenomenology, Moore (1991) articulates this distinction by stating that "some experience is beyond people's conceptualization. The fact that some aspects of reality are not apprehended by human beings does not mean that the reality does not exist. Furthermore, much experience is beyond consciousness and is, thus, beyond the realm of conscious human perceiving or interpreting" (p. 111). The existentialist Gabriel Marcel addresses this issue in his discussion of **being** and **having**; his insistence on the mystery of Being points up the irreducibility of human existence to a merely spatio-temporal reality, which is the focus of phenomenology (Stewart and Mickunas, 1990, pp.78-80). These distinctions are a useful counteraction against assuming too much from any one philosophy or tradition. This difference in understanding reality does not, in my view, preclude using the method of phenomenological research to advantage within various religious traditions, as demonstrated, for instance, by Brendan Hyde in the Australian Catholic school system (2004, 2005b).

Chris Arthur (1995) also raises some questions about the limitations of phenomenology in religious education. Although his concerns are mainly limited to the phenomenology of religion, which he notes now equals the position once held by 'comparative religion,' his reflections about the purpose of such research hold relevance for individual-focused research as well. He contends that, if all our energies are devoted to finding out **about** religions without making any effort to look at truth, their application to us and whether or not we **ought** to be religious, the exercise becomes false. "In short, religions are concerned with *transformation*, not *information*, and from many points of view what phenomenology of religion does can only be seen as relevant *if it eventually leads beyond itself to commitment and action"* (Arthur, 1995, p. 460). Following Arthur's perspective, I hope that my research into the spiritual lives of children will lead to a deeper understanding of and sensitivity to the way religious educators in my tradition attend to children and their worship and pedagogical settings.

Research Design

Method

Following the model developed by van Manen (1997) of the University of Alberta, the method of inquiry was primarily conversational interviews. Because of the limitation of language development in young children, a combination of interview and artistic expression was used with them. While almost half of the participants were children, ages 4-12, youth and adults were also interviewed for their remembered experiences.

Altogether, I had conversation with fifty-two individuals: twenty-five children aged 4 to 12, seven teenagers aged 14 to 19, and twenty adults. The twenty-five children

were distributed in the following age categories: five were ages 4-6; eight were ages 7-8; eight were ages 9-10; and four were ages 11-12. Eight adults were in the 35-55 age category, and twelve were aged 60-75.

The participants were drawn from a wide circle of my acquaintances within my religious denomination. I personally knew all of the adult participants with the exception of one man who was interviewed for me by a prison chaplain. Although there was a bit of diversity, the majority of the adults interviewed were economically stable and had post-secondary education. For the religious and cultural background of this group, see pages 36-37 below.

The interviews lasted between fifteen minutes and an hour, depending upon the age of the participant and the richness of the memory. Generally, interviews with the younger participants lasted from fifteen to twenty minutes. In a number of instances, children were not able to verbalise their experiences, but were willing to draw pictures (see question # 3); in these cases, they were given as much time as they wished to make their pictures (sometimes several days). When they brought their drawings to me, they were invited to talk about them. I also showed most of the children photographs of two small Danish churches similar in size to the churches most of my interviewees attend but which had been redecorated in a very colourful, folk-art style quite different from the more restrained and relatively plain style of the Maritime churches. I invited the children's responses (see question # 6) to these pictures but since I discovered the Danish churches early in the interview process, a few of the first interviewees did not see them. The photographs were shown to six of the teens as well.

The interviews, which were audio-taped for transcription, took place in a variety of settings. When parents were approached for permission to interview their children, I offered them a choice of place for the sake of convenience and comfort. Some parents chose their own homes for the interviews where they could be present in an adjacent room while I interviewed the children; a couple of parents remained in the interview room with the children. I conducted a considerable number of interviews of participants of all ages around the kitchen or dining-room table (continuing a venerable Maritime tradition). A number of children's interviews were conducted at church, either in the children's worship room, in an available room or in the sanctuary itself. In two instances, I walked around the church with children and talked with them about the space. Most adult participants chose to be interviewed in their homes although a few chose their offices.

The following questions were used:

For children:

1. Can you tell me about your church, or about your Sunday School room? Can you describe it for me? What do you notice/look at when you're in church?
2. How do you feel about the church you go to now? What are your favourite spaces? How do you feel when you are there? Are there spaces in the church you don't like (or like as much)? How do you feel in those spaces?
3. Should there be special spaces in the church just for children? What would they look like?
4. What do you like about going to church? What don't you like about going to church?

5. If you could build a church (and/or improve your church), what would it look like? What would it look like inside? Can you draw it for me?

6. Here are some pictures of two churches which are rather different from your church. Could you tell me how you feel about these churches?

7. Can you tell me a story about one time you were in church?

For teens and adults:

1. What are your earliest memories of church? Would you describe a particular experience?

2. What can you remember of the building? Especially of the inside?

3. What did you feel when you were in the building – in the entry, in the sanctuary, in other rooms?

Recruitment was carried out in the following manner:

1. Personal contact was made with families with whom I had a measure of trust and a reputation of personal integrity. Before the children/youth were asked if they would like to participate in this study, parents/guardians were asked for permission to approach their children/youth for interviews.

2. Individuals who were known to me, or who were recommended, were asked if they and/or their children were willing to participate in this study.

3. General invitations to participate in this study were circulated in two churches (see Advertisement below).

The research process followed the general pattern of: conducting the interviews, initial analysis of data, follow-up with interviewees if necessary, and final analysis for meaning units and themes, and reflecting on the gathered experiences in writing.

Advertisement for Participants

Do you have vivid memories of the physical space of the church/es you attended as a very young child? Do you have a particular experience (either positive or negative) of a church building (the exterior or any interior space) you would be willing to share?

Carol Anne Janzen is looking for accounts of childhood experiences of church for a research project on children's experiences of "sacred space." Willing participants will be interviewed and the accounts will be used in her dissertation for a Ph.D. degree in Religious and Moral Education at the University of Alberta.

If you would be willing to be interviewed, please contact Carol Anne at ....

Approach to Children

As noted earlier, phenomenological research prescribes an approach that is thoughtful, mindful and respectful. Such an approach is especially suited to the study of children, who present challenges common to their age and personhood. It is tempting to reduce childhood to a stage which we might survey, categorise and label with clearly identifiable characteristics. But as van Manen reminds us in *The Tone of Teaching* (2002), "Tactful educators have developed a caring attentiveness to the unique: the uniqueness of children, the uniqueness of every situation, and the uniqueness of individual lives" (p. 8). Richard Mills underscores the adult tendency to develop social constructions of childhood which impede our recognition of "its shifting visions, its lack of watertight compartments, its illusory and elusive nature: what Steedman refers to as its 'extraordinary plasticity'" (Mills, 2000, p. 9).

A sensitive attentiveness to those being 'studied' is distinctive of good phenomenological research and is particularly appropriate to the study of children. Such attentiveness not only facilitates the deconstruction of ubiquitous and monistic constructs of childhood [for instance, the child as innocent, as natural, as good, as sinful (Mills &

Mills, 2000)], but also opens a researcher to new ways of seeing and perceiving. When each child is approached with thoughtfulness, his or her uniqueness is more readily apprehended, and we come closer to understanding the variety and authenticity of human/childhood experience.

Moreover, an attitude of respect and integrity allows a researcher to develop a trusting relationship with a child. In a world in which children are constantly reminded to beware of strangers, it is essential for a researcher to approach children with care. As remarked earlier, this often takes a considerable amount of time. For this research project, I interacted with a core group of young children regularly (ages 4 to 9), often once a week, over a period of three years, before I began interviewing them. During this time I led or assisted in a Sunday children's worship using the approach of Young Children and Worship ®, developed by Jerome Berryman and Sonja Stewart (1989) from the Montessorian approach to religious education as inherited and developed by Sofia Cavalletti (Cavalletti, 1992).

Faithful to Montessori's vision of childhood education, this approach to children's worship is sensorimotor, primarily visual, oral and kinaesthetic. Within the traditional four-fold order of worship (assembling to worship, proclaiming the Word, giving thanks, and going out in God's name), the children are invited to listen to one of the Biblical stories and to respond individually and creatively to open-ended wondering questions. In this approach the children are welcomed by name to the worship centre, and are dismissed with a personal blessing. The atmosphere is quiet and relaxed, and adult leaders are gentle and non-intrusive in their interactions with the children. Because their workplay is their personal expression, there are no uniform standards or expectations;

every child's creation is honoured. In theological terms, each child is seen as bearing the *imago Dei*, the image of God.

Assisting with children's worship has provided me with the foundation for developing a pedagogical relationship with the children which is based on respect and care. When I meet any of these children in another setting, say at the local Saturday market, I am greeted with spontaneous signs of delighted recognition. I began my interview by telling the child that I was interested in what children think and feel ('experience' is too big a word for some of them), especially in what they have to share with me. This introduction seemed to open a door for genuine sharing, even though the child may still have responded with conventional responses.

It is not always possible to develop a familiar relationship with each child in only one interview. In such instances, other approaches presented themselves. Serendipitously, I was invited to share a weekly supper meal for approximately eight months with a family of three children. This opportunity allowed me to learn to know these children and them to learn to know me. Another family with two young children invited me to dinner with the girls before I interviewed them, so "they could get to know who you are," in a safe and familiar setting. A few children, to whom I was unfamiliar, preferred to have their mother in the room with us or close by. One out-going, self-confident five-year-old who has experienced an unsettled home-life in her young life, and to whom I was simply introduced as "Nanny's friend," responded unselfconsciously and candidly to my questions. A friend's nine-year-old daughter, who could not remember ever meeting me, entered into our conversation with exuberance, designing with unfettered imagination a church that soon developed fairground characteristics. Again, I was reminded that each

child is an unique person, with individual traits born out of a complex set of life circumstances. It was my task to meet each of them with a thoughtful attentiveness that would allow them to be that unique self.

Religious-Cultural Context of Research

This study is situated primarily in my religious tradition – the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches (CABC). This denomination, a part of the federation of Canadian Baptist Ministries (CBM), is defined as Conservative Protestant (Bowen, 2004), although in Nova Scotia it is in many ways more representative of Mainline Protestantism. Most of the individuals interviewed were from this tradition. Two adults from the Roman Catholic tradition and one from the Church of Ireland tradition (all three now attending Baptist churches) were interviewed. The spectrum in terms of culture and ethnicity is also relatively homogenous: one child and four teenagers are indigenous African-Nova Scotian; one adult is a bilingual Acadian, and one child and two teenagers are bilingual children of Acadia-Anglo parents; the majority of the interviewees are Anglo-Canadians by birth or by assimilation. This ratio is generally reflective of the make-up of the faith community which is the context of this research. The population of rural and small-town Atlantic Canada has remained relatively homogenous compared to the greater, urban population of Canada; rural Atlantic Canada is still dominated by people of western European background. However, Nova Scotia, and to a lesser extent New Brunswick, has a significant indigenous African-Canadian population, the majority of whom have Baptist affiliations.

Given the richness and diversity of all religious tradition and experience, choosing to locate my research primarily in my own tradition might be construed as setting a

narrow parameter. However, because I teach and write for the Atlantic Baptist constituency, I have chosen to explore this tradition. The lived experiences of the young children in this selected religious environment represent a slice of human experience; it is hoped that their experiences will inform and enlighten pedagogical practices in religious education particularly in the Atlantic segment of Canadian society.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have attempted to show that phenomenological inquiry is not only an appropriate, but a commendable research methodology for studying aspects of religious life. Admittedly, religion concerns that which is ineffable, but it also comprises a way of being in the world. In theological terms, Christianity, the particular faith tradition in which this study is located, is strongly linked to the physical world reflected in the words of the apostle John, "We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life" (1 John 1: 1). Phenomenological inquiry with its emphasis on the lived experience provides an estimable approach to the exploration of what the Iona Abbey communion liturgy calls "the ordinary things of this world " (Iona Community, 2001).

This form of inquiry not only provides an approach but also mandates a way of being that is particularly important in interacting with children. Van Manen describes this way of being as characterised by thoughtfulness or mindfulness which I perceive as the foundation for building a climate of trust – essential to meaningful relationships with children and to integrous Christian education.

I have explored at some length my appreciation for phenomenology as a research methodology in regard to religious education in an effort both to defend my choice for this particular study and to encourage its use in future religious research. Specifically, I would recommend it to Christian education researchers.

A few additional comments are in order to provide a rationale for my approach to research in general and to this study in particular. As an individual with eclectic interests, I find the postmodern approach to research suited to my work – working as a bricoleur, drawing on a variety of methods and perspectives and paradigms as they are needed to adequately inquire into an area of interest (Ellis, 2007). Further, phenomenology as a specialised discipline resides within the larger field of Human Science research. The Saybrook Graduate School and Research Center defines Human Science as:

> a philosophy and approach to science that seeks to understand human experience in deeply subjective, personal, historical, contextual, cross-cultural, political, and spiritual terms. Human Science is the science of qualities rather than quantities and closes the subject-object split in science. In particular, it addresses the ways in which self-reflection, art, music, poetry, drama, language and imagery reveal the human condition. By being interpretive, reflective, and appreciative, Human Science re-opens the conversation among science, art, and philosophy. (Saybrook, 2007)

I particularly like the idea of a conversation among science, art and philosophy. Bruce Mazlish (1998), in his inquiry into the condition of the human sciences, captures the nature of such conversation in his comment about "circling and recircling" around issues or subjects in order to achieve the whole (p. 3). While phenomenology provides the philosophical discipline for my research, art (in the form of sculpture, literature and poetry) and science (recent studies in neurobiology and human behaviour) contribute to the conversation that comprises this study. "Circling and recircling" may very well be an

apt description of this dissertation, which I hope contributes to the whole picture of children's spiritual relation to religious place and space.

The two loci of my research – the built environment of the church and children's experiences – provide the experiential subject matter (that which is experienced and those who experience it) for this study. 'Sacred place' and 'sacred space' are terms frequently used to describe the built environment of the church. In the following chapter, Chapter III, I explore general approaches to these two terms, and provide a contextual understanding of them related to the specific research setting in Atlantic Canada. Chapter IV is devoted to an examination of current thinking about children's spirituality with a view to presenting an understanding of children that under-girds this study.

CHAPTER III: TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF SACRED PLACE AND SPACE

Place and Space in Western Discourse

Any discussion of the concept of sacred place and space is best begun with a view of the history of place and space in Western discourse. In disciplines such as geography, architecture, education, philosophy and theology, the construct of place has received marked attention in the past few decades. The recent interest in the particularity of place reverses centuries of emphasis on the more universalising concepts of space and time (Casey, 1997).

Although the terms 'space' and 'place' are often used interchangeably in common parlance, there appears to be a common feeling that space is more abstract than place. We tend to think of space as in 'outer space' while place is associated with a particular location (Inge, 2003, 1). Inge differentiates between the two terms in the following manner: "The two terms might be thought of as tending towards opposite ends of a spectrum which has the local at one end and the infinite at the other end. Spaces are what are filled with places" (p. 2).

Edward Casey encapsulates the modernist attitude:

> In the past three centuries in the West – the period of 'modernity' – place has come to be not only neglected but actively suppressed. Owning to the triumph of the natural and social sciences in this same period, any serious talk of place has been regarded as regressive or trivial. A discourse has emerged whose exclusive cosmological foci are Time and Space. When the two were combined by twentieth century physicists into the amalgam 'space-time' the overlooking of place was only continued by another means. For an entire epoch, place has been regarded as an impoverished cousin of Time and Space, those two colossal cosmic partners towering over modernity. (Casey, 1993, p. xiv)

John Inge pursues this theme, claiming that Western academia became obsessed first with space and then with time largely due to the pre-eminence of science and its

interest in phenomena that could be abstracted. "Things which cannot be abstracted lost their appeal during the period of modernity and its search for 'universals'" (Inge, 2003, p. 10). This trend intensified in the late twentieth century as globalisation and the technological revolution waged war on the 'particularity of place' in the race to annihilate geographical boundaries and time constraints. Electronic and market forces strove to subjugate the idiosyncrasies of individual *places* to create a hegemonic and global market*place*.

As the dehumanising effects of globalisation became more apparent, philosophers and cultural geographers among others began to retrieve the importance of place. Phenomenologists, who accord significance to the individual and personal experience, directed their attention to the specifics of place. Of particular importance is Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), whose major contributions to this topic included *Being and Time,* "Being Dwelling Thinking," "Poetically, Man Dwells" and "Why Do I Stay in the Provinces" (Sharr, 2006).

As one reads the writings of cultural geographers on place, Heidegger's influence is immediately evident (Seamon, 1984; Relph, 1989; Casey, 1997). Heidegger thought of the human person as a *Dasein*, literally a 'being' (*sein*) 'there' (*da*); the essence of personhood for Heidegger was associated with being situated in place, or embedded in the world (Inge, 2003; Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2005; Sharr, 2006). One's very mode of existence as a human being was, from this perspective, inextricably connected with place; one could not exist nowhere or in no place.

From a theological perspective, Walter Brueggemann (1977) presented an argument for the centrality of place in human experience:

> Place is space that has historical meanings, where some things have happened which are now remembered and which provide continuity and identity across generations. Place is space in which important words have been spoken which have established identity, defined vocation, and envisioned destiny. Place is space in which vows have been exchanged, promises have been made, and demands have been issued. Place is indeed a protest against the unpromising pursuit of space. It is a declaration that our humanness cannot be found in escape, detachment, absence of commitment, and undefined freedom. (p. 5)

In the past several decades, 'sacred space' and 'sacred place' have also emerged as subjects of interest both for the scholar in religious studies and for the popular imagination. Due in no small part to the writings of Mircea Eliade, chair of religious studies at Chicago University, 1958-1986, 'sacred space' (as well as sacred time) is now part of the vocabulary of the field of comparative religions, with anthropological focus on the symbolism, transmitted traditions of meaning and cultic significance of sacred sites (Eliade, 1959). As well, a burgeoning popular literature on sacred sites, pilgrimage routes and destinations continues to grow.

The terms 'sacred place' or 'sacred space' can be obscure or vague. Personal interpretations of the terms are manifold, while the literature on the subject is eclectic. The following excerpts underscore the diversity of perspectives in this discourse.

Belden Lane, a professor in theological studies at St. Louis University, writes and speaks extensively on what he identifies as "landscapes of the sacred." He defines sacred place as "'a construction of the imagination that affirms the independence of the holy'" (quoted in McLuhan, 1996).

In a popular, secular vein, in an issue of *Time* focusing on possible future life-styles in the twenty-first century, the drama and film director/designer, Julie Taymor (2000), had this to say in an article entitled "What will we do on Saturday night?"

> Now we ask whether video/computer/virtual-reality images streaming into our homes will keep us on the couch Saturday night. I doubt it.... The senses are a huge part of the experience.... Spaces, architectural enclosures, shape our relation to an event. You can pray at home. But a church, mosque or synagogue gives prayer scale, grace and a heightened sense of spirituality because of the aura of sacred ritual deemed appropriate within the religious house. People cling to ritual. It gives structure and comfort to chaos. It creates a sense of awe.... If we, as social animals, are to be lured away from the convenience and comfort of our home-entertainment center, it will be for a shared physical, sensory experience that yields the unique and evokes awe. (pp. 73-74)

One of the richest explorations of sacred architecture from a specifically Christian perspective is a recent book, *The Geometry of Love.* In this Canadian bestseller, classics scholar and cultural anthropologist, Margaret Visser, leads her reader on a spiritual, cultural and historical journey through one ancient church – Sant'Agnese fuori le Mura in Rome. Perceptively and poetically, Visser reveals the power of a building to evoke intense emotional and spiritual responses from its visitors.

In the opening chapter of her book, she defines her understanding of the purpose of a sacred building:

> Now a church (or a temple or a synagogue or a mosque – any religious building) knows perfectly well that it cannot induce in anyone a mystical experience. What it does is acknowledge such experience as any of its visitors has had, as explicitly as it can. A church is recognition, in stone and wood and brick, of spiritual awakenings. It nods, to each individual person. If the building has been created within a cultural and religious tradition, it constitutes a collective memory of spiritual insights, of thousands of mystical moments. A church reminds us of what we have known. And it tells us the possibility of the door swinging open again remains. (Visser, 2000, p. 11)

She goes on to say:

> Memory, in a church, is not only individual, but also collective: the building is a meeting house for a group of people who agree with each other in certain important respects.... A church stands in total opposition to the narrowing and flattening of human experience, the deviation into the trivial, that follow from antipathy towards meaning, and especially meaning held in common. Meaning is intentional: this building has been made in order to communicate with the people in it. A church is no place to practise aesthetic distance, to erase content and

> simply appreciate form. The building is trying to speak; not listening to what it has to say is a form of barbarous inattention, like admiring a musical instrument while caring nothing for music. (p. 12)

T. C. McLuhan (1996) explores in more depth the phenomenology of how humans react to their physical environment, concluding, "Sacred architecture has always utilized the sensual apprehension of architecture to communicate particular meanings, and there is a range of perceptual reactions that result from a rich spatial environment as particularly evidenced by the sequence of the path and place."

The architect Norman L. Koonce (2005), in his article "Erasing the boundary between the physical and the spiritual," writes that human beings are "not only physical beings with physical needs that require accommodation; we are spiritual beings that seek a relationship with a realm above and beyond time. In forging this relationship, architecture does not simply provide an envelope in which the ineffable can be experienced; it participates in the experience by providing a portal that erases or at least makes more transparent the boundary between matter and mind, flesh and the spirit."

The provocative architectural theorist, Christopher Alexander, argues for an architecture that is based on what he describes as "feeling" or "aliveness," that is, on what makes us feel whole or fully human and speaks deeply to the human spirit. Seeking through three decades of intense and rigorous observation and experimentation to give beauty in structure an empirical foundation, Alexander has developed what he calls an "alphabet" of fifteen properties that contribute to the inner coherence and beauty of the built environment (CBC, 2003b).

Alexander's thesis finds an interesting corollary in recent neuro-biological research. Scientists are exploring, with the aid of increasingly sophisticated tools such as

the fMRI, the intricate workings of the brain. One of their tentative findings is that those areas of the brain most active during strong spiritual experiences are also related to the affective element of human experience (Newberg, D'Aquili, & Rause, 2001).

Because Mircea Eliade's definitions of the sacred have been so influential in Western discourse for the past half-century, they demand our attention. According to Eliade, "The first possible definition of the *sacred* is that it is *the opposite of the profane*" (1959, p. 10, his emphasis). Eliade situated his discussion in an existential perspective, stating "that *sacred* and *profane* are two modes of being in the world, two existential situations assumed by man in the course of his history" (p. 14). He was interested in how ancient humans experienced the sacred in their lives. Claiming that the sacred manifests itself as wholly other (*ganz andere*), he proposed the term 'hierophany' to designate the manifestations of sacred realities. In traditional societies "a sacred place constitutes a break in the homogeneity of space," providing a connection between earth and heaven, between the human and divine (p. 37). Eliade decried the post-industrialized development of a desacralized world in which modern man had "assumed a profane existence," contending "that desacralization pervades the entire experience of the nonreligious man of modern societies and that, in consequence, he finds it increasingly difficult to rediscover the existential dimensions of religious man in archaic societies" (p. 13). However, he maintained that even totally secular people were still unconsciously nourished by the memory of the sacred.

Judaeo-Christian Canonical Perspectives on Sacred Place and Space

The Hebrew Canon

For Christians, sacred scripture (the Bible) is the crucible in which human experience and reason is tested and refined to produce a living theology. In Gadamer's term, it produces the "horizon" or historically-determined situatedness in which understanding and interpretation occur (Malpas, 2003). Understanding is not imprisoned within the horizon of its situation, but rather enters into a dialogical conversation with other horizons of experience. To enter the biblical text for the purpose of identifying the salient factors influencing the formation of a specific horizon is to engage in a hermeneutical exercise that is not closed or definitive. Other horizons are possible, but to begin this conversation I will explore certain themes in the biblical narrative. My purpose here is not to treat the historical/archaeological development of concepts but rather to identify the themes in the transmitted text – i.e., the biblical narrative – which have shaped the identity and religious practice of orthodox Christianity.

The concept of sacred space is a recurring motif throughout the Judaeo-Christian canon. It is, moreover, one that changes conceptually throughout history. Typical of many primitive societies, early Jewish culture was characterised by a sacrificial religious system, in which the favour of the deity and concomitant fertility was sought. The first biblical evidence is shown in the story of Cain and Abel, who each made an offering to the Lord of their respective agricultural products, with an ensuing rivalry and violent outcome. Early patriarchs such as Noah and Abraham are portrayed identifying with the construction of altars the places where God has been experienced, thereby creating holy or sacred places. "Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, 'To your descendents I

will give this land.' So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him" (Genesis 12:7). The Hebrew canon is replete with narratives of significant events in the lives of the Hebrew people, events which were identified for posterity by the construction of altars or by the attribution of a natural landmark. The aspect of holiness or sacredness ascribed to a particular landmark or place is illustrated by the story of Moses in the desert: as he approaches a bush which burns without being consumed, Moses hears a voice which commands, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5).

A number of developments during the Mosaic era (time associated with Moses) led to a discernibly new orientation. Following the exodus of the Hebrew people from their slavery in Egypt, and to mark the gift of the Law embodied in the Ten Commandments, Moses was told by God that the people must build an altar on which to sacrifice their offerings, the fruit of their labours. Interestingly, the altar was to be constructed of earth or natural materials (Giles, 2004, p. 13).

> You need make for me only an altar of earth and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your offerings of well-being, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you. But if you make for me an altar of stone, do not build it of hewn stones; for if you use a chisel upon it you profane it. (Genesis 20: 24-25)

Richard Giles suggests that this text also indicates that there was to be no limitation of time and space in honouring God; an altar may be built "in every place where I cause my name to be remembered" for there "I will come to you and bless you" (p. 13).

This era was also marked by a new spatial orientation in worship and human-divine interaction: we encounter the first mention of a structure in which the community

can gather to worship. Through Moses, the Hebrew people were directed by God to "make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25: 8). Very specific instructions were given for the construction, embellishment and maintenance of the tent/tabernacle and for the setting apart of a priesthood to serve it. The finest materials were to be used, even for a portable structure that would accompany them on their peripatetic journey. The tabernacle was to be a constant and visible sign of God's presence with this people. Giles (2004) captured the theological and social significance of this new dynamic in which the primitive concept of holy place is coupled with the complementary concept of God journeying with the people of God:

> This sanctuary is not however to be some static holy place to which the people of God make pilgrimage. In a tremendously significant revelation which set Judaism apart from all other surrounding religions (and which again is highly relevant to contemporary liturgical thinking), the people of God are set free from dependence on a single dot on the map. Instead of the people of God having to journey to him, God will travel with them, that every place where the sanctuary is set up may become holy ground. … By means of this sanctuary, God will come to be with his people, wherever they go. (p. 14)

During the eleventh century BCE, as this collection of nomadic shepherds gradually coalesced into a nation, a corresponding development took place in religious belief and practice. With the institution of the monarchy, a magnificent temple was constructed circa 922 BCE in the national capital of Jerusalem, to match the glory of the king's palace. Although King David had desired to build a permanent home for the Ark of the Covenant (2 Samuel 7), it was given to his son, Solomon, to have that privilege (see 1 Kings 6:11-13 and 1 Chronicles 17:1-15 for detailed descriptions of this architectural wonder of the ancient Near East). Biblical scholars suggest that this permanence of place was a controversial and life-changing affair. God would now be enshrined in a fixed location instead of travelling with the people. Yet even with this new

institution there was an ambivalent note, as Solomon was recorded asking the rhetorical question, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built" (1 Kings 8: 27). Although people would continue to worship at shrines (after the construction of the temple), especially in the mountains, they were consistently discouraged from doing so; pilgrimages to Jerusalem became the religious requisite.

Given the centralised importance of the temple for the national religion, two events during the following millennium proved cataclysmic for faith and practice. First, in 587 BCE, the temple was destroyed by invading Babylonians and the Hebrews carried off into exile throughout Egypt, Babylon and Palestine. Although it was reconstructed after the return of the exiles under Nehemiah, and restored to even greater magnificence during the time of Jesus, it was razed to the ground in 70 CE, never to be rebuilt, and the Jews dispersed throughout the Roman Empire (Bright, 1981).

During the first Exile, and accelerating after the second Diaspora, the worship practices of the Jewish religion mutated again in response to the deprivation of temple access and its sacrificial system. "Instead of reverting to the previous pattern of wide-spread priestly sacrifice in localised sanctuaries, it dispensed with sanctuary and sacrifice altogether; first for a limited period (during the Exile) and then permanently (after AD70)" (Giles, 2004, p. 25). In an effort to maintain their religious identity, the dispersed Jews created the synagogue, which, along with the home, became the focus of worship and education for the scattered communities. The original meaning of *synagogue* was 'gathering;' later it came to mean a place or a building (Cole & Morgan, in Giles, p. 26). The synagogue became the place of regular meeting – on sabbaths and holy days – to

study the Law and to pray. By the beginning of the Common Era there were synagogues in practically every settlement where Jews lived; the prerequisite for the establishment of a synagogue was a quorum of ten male Jews. This format – a place of public assembly for worship – has had a formative influence on the development of subsequent Christian worship practices.

An ambivalent discourse runs through this early Judaic narrative, relating directly to 'sacred place' and its relationship to faithful worship. The perceived significance of the temple for the Hebrews and later for the Christians is paradoxical. Although God is portrayed as reluctant to sanction the building of a permanent house of worship, speaking through the prophet Nathan to David (see 2 Samuel 7), God endorsed Solomon's endeavours to construct the temple. Although, in the post-exilic period with the people of God scattered, divinity was not limited to the Jerusalem temple, God was to be honoured by the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. After the first destruction and subsequent return of the exiles, the prophet Haggai was explicit in his message that God expected the rebuilding of the temple (Haggai 1).

The New Testament Record

The New Testament echoes two themes found in the Old Testament: respect for "the house of God" (represented by the temple) and the importance of synagogue attendance. Jesus acknowledged the priestly system (Mark 1:44) and used the temple as a base for his teaching (Matthew 21:23); he was incensed by the desecration of the temple by exploiting merchants, as recorded in all four Gospels (see Mark 11:15-17). Jesus was also faithful in synagogue attendance and, moreover, began his public ministry in the local synagogue. "He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him" (Luke 4: 15-17a).

According to the scriptural record, this pattern regarding places of religious assembly continued with Jesus' followers after his lifetime. As already noted, the temple was destroyed about thirty years after Jesus' death, in 70 CE, which effectively ended the temple-based system. However, the synagogue and home remained centrally important to the worship and teaching life of the Jewish and (subsequently) Christian faith communities.

The first Christians used the buildings of the Jewish community in which they were born (Acts 6: 7; Acts 13: 14-15), but as the decades passed and more new adherents came from the Gentile community, the rift between the traditional Jewish community and the new movement widened. By the end of the first century, the link between the two had been irrevocably severed. This development strongly influenced the meeting habits of the growing Christian community, leading to "the era of the domestic church" (Foley, 1991, p. 27) as believers were forced to meet in homes, often the larger homes of the wealthier adherents, and other secretive places (such as the catacombs) to a lesser degree, to escape wide-spread persecution.

> As it is in the natural way of things, some of these temporary arrangements edged into permanency, and houses were gradually commandeered as more or less permanent meeting places for the Christian assembly. Larger houses of this period, consisting of a series of rooms grouped around an open courtyard, made excellent venues for the Christian assembly to meet, providing a progression of spaces suitable for the different elements of the community's life and worship. The earliest example identified to date is the house at Dura Europos in Syria. (Giles, 2004, p. 32)

Maritime Sacred Architecture – Free Church Tradition

The sacred architecture of Nova Scotia reflects the theological diversity in approaches to houses of worship among its Christian population. As has been documented by Allan Duffus (1982), Elizabeth Pacey (1983) and their colleagues, the Maritime Provinces developed an early, regional architecture which reflected the dominant influences of British classicism and American colonial idiom imported in the eighteenth century. (Unfortunately, the French Acadian tradition was eradicated at the time of the Expulsion of 1755.) Examples of these early building styles in their original form still remain, but as time went on, "there was an eventual blending of the two styles which resulted in an architecture which is unique in Canada" (Duffus, 1982, p. 23).

The meeting house style of early church architecture (essentially a creation of the Congregationalists) was brought to Nova Scotia between 1760 and 1776 from New England by colonists who had been recruited to take up the fertile farmlands of the expelled Acadian population.

> There were no European precedents for this type of building. It originated in the American colonies as a community building where the business of the town was conducted and, at appropriate times during the week, religious services held. Built first by the Puritans in New England, it was without ornamentation, embellishment or symbols that might recall the Church of England. (Duffus, 1982, p. 25)

The design into which this form evolved was a simple rectangular plan with a pitched, gabled roof, often a bell tower at one end, and built entirely of wood (the most identifiable characteristic of Nova Scotian architecture); in the interior, the pulpit was placed opposite the main entrance door (often on the long side) and a gallery ran around the three other walls. "This style of meeting house, barn-like in its simplicity, and very much like a house, rather than a church in form, was built in Nova Scotia" (Duffus, 1982,

p. 25).

Gradually, the form became more recognisable as a traditional church, with a more gently sloped roof, the main door at one end and the pulpit on the opposite end, and some ornamentation. This style was adopted by the Baptists, the Presbyterians and the Methodists, and led to a distinctive form of church design in the province. Elements of British classicism, such as pediments, columns, Palladian windows and fine steeples, were a strong influence well into the nineteenth century. Later in the century, the neo-gothic revival exerted some influence, most notably in pointed windows, ornamental buttresses and finials and increased use of unsymmetrical configurations in the placement of steeples and main entrances. While regional preferences sometimes overruled them, denominational preferences for certain styles were pronounced. The Roman Catholics preferred the traditional Nova Scotia style as well as Romanesque and Baroque; the Anglicans chose unsymmetrical styles with gothic detailing; Lutherans also preferred unsymmetrical styles; the Baptists, along with the Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists, continued to prefer the plain meeting house and traditional, symmetrical, classical styles (Pacey, 1983, p. 19).

Stone construction was not common in early Nova Scotia, and brick construction even more uncommon. In many cases, the few churches executed in these materials still reflected the simple style of the sturdy timber and clapboard structures. As historical architects have noted, the early churches, whether of stone or wood, were well-constructed and maintained, and have become permanent features of the cultural landscape, remaining a source of reference for future generations of worshippers and builders (Duffus, 1982, p. 41).

The church style favoured by Nova Scotian Baptists is an admirable representation of vernacular architecture, as opposed to the monumental. The word "vernacular" derives from the Latin *verna*, meaning a slave born in the household (Random House, 2006) and, thus, by extension the life of one defined by the village or estate (Gorringe, 2003, p. 134). Architect Witold Rybczynski (1989) suggests that the vernacular is what is common in a given area at a given time; the same building, in another time and place, might not be considered vernacular. "In other words, so-called vernacular buildings – folk architecture – cannot be characterized by their inherent qualities but only by their shared commonness" (p. 11).

Tim Gorringe's explanation of the vernacular as "a common sense approach built out of necessity" (p. 135) describes the Nova Scotian approach with its response to local climate conditions and knowledge of and respect for its materials: the winter cycle of freeze-thaw is unkind to mortar and fine timber was readily available and economical. The vernacular is also responsive to social form and tradition: the plain, unadorned and simple meeting house style embodied the inherited theology of a people who had rejected the elaborate accoutrements of the established church and utilised the fine timber-frame building skills handed down from their American colonial ancestors. The white, clapboard church is an ubiquitous sight throughout Maritime Canada, and often appears to be embedded in the psyche of its inhabitants. This identification with and attachment to the house of the church becomes most evident when a congregation outgrows its original structure or dies as the community from which it springs withers from economic or social pressures. In such instances, heroic measures are often taken to preserve a building that may be opened only for an anniversary service once a year, or for a few

weeks during the summer. These churches are part of the vernacular language and memory of the community (from the Latin *commūnitās*, fellowship, from *commūnis*, common) – the common household of a particular faith tradition. As such, they hold such a strong grip on the collective conscious that their mere physical presence continues to speak of the community's faith.

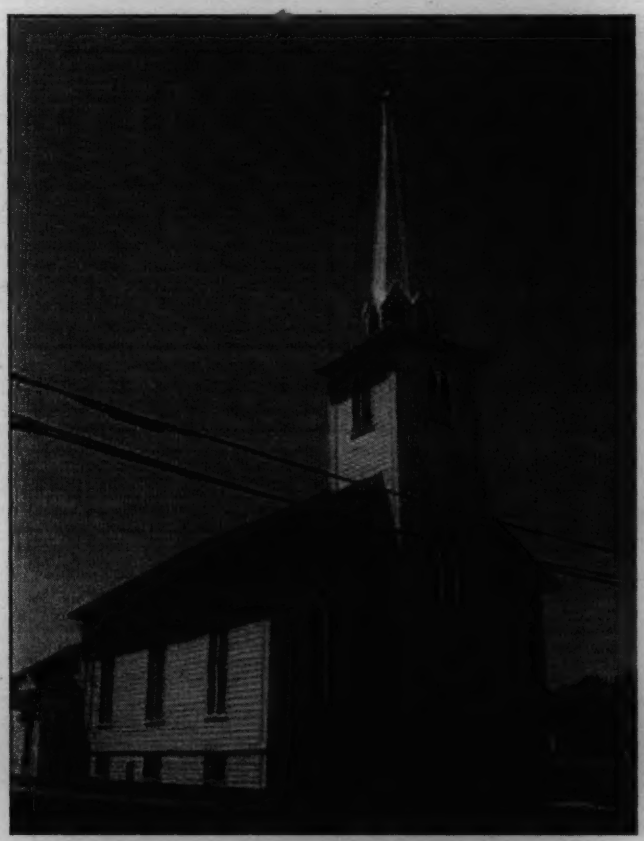

Figure 2. A typical Protestant Christian church in the Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia.

A Theology of Place and Space

In *A Christian Theology of Place*, John Inge (2003) explores the concepts of place and space from an orthodox Christian perspective. After examining recent scholarship

that approaches the topic from the perspectives of geography, phenomenology, sociology and comparative religions, Inge concludes that Christian theologians have not given serious attention to place, being "wedded to the norms of modernity" which are now being questioned in other disciplines (p. 32). He quotes Susan White, who asserts that up to now most Christian theology of sacred space has been neither very theological nor very Christian (p. 29). Through his thorough scriptural exegesis and careful theological arguments, Inge convincingly demonstrates the importance of place in the Christian canon.

Brueggemann's study on the subject of place in the Old Testament, originally published in the mid-seventies and recently re-published, was one of the few that dealt with the issue of the emplacement of divine-human interaction. In this landmark study, he concluded:

> In the Old Testament there is no timeless space but there also is no spaceless time. There is rather *storied place*, that is a place which has meaning because of the history lodged there. There are stories which have authority because they are located in a place… And for all its apparent 'spiritualizing,' the New Testament does not escape this rootage. (Brueggemann, 1977, p. 185)

Inge (2003) develops this concept further, proposing that an authentic biblical attitude to place will acknowledge a relational view between place, God and humanity. He contends that "places are the seat of relations between God and the world. God relates *to* people *in* places, and the places are not irrelevant to that relationship, but rather, are integral to divine human encounter" (p. 58). E. V. Walker expressed this even more explicitly:

> we take for granted ritual and doctrine as theological subjects, but we tend to overlook the theology of building, settling, and dwelling. As expressions of religious experience, sacred places are as important as doctrine and ritual. They energise and shape religious meaning. They help to make religious experience

> intelligible. A sacred place is not only an environment of sensory phenomena, but a moral environment as well. (quoted in Inge, p. 31)

The importance of place is found not only in Hebrew narrative, but also in the central tenet of the Christian faith – the incarnation of the Divine in the man, Jesus, which occurred in time and in place. Word became flesh. In asserting this doctrine, Christian scripture and theology asserted the importance of the body and, by implication, the importance of place; since there can be no experience of place without body, there can be no experience of body without place. In Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's words, 'in becoming man, God becomes matter.' Inge sums up this concept, "We might say, therefore, that it is clear from the incarnation that *places are the seat of relations or the place of meeting and activity in the interaction between God and the world,* and argue that place is therefore a fundamental category of human and spiritual experience" (p. 52).

The Christian narrative of spiritual experience underscores the importance of place in individual human experience. Throughout history, the stories of those who have recorded their spiritual journeys have linked personal epiphanies with particular places. Christian memory is inescapably bound to place. In E. V. Walker's phrase, place is "a location of experience" (quoted in Inge, p. 83). The integral connection between place and experience is just as evident in children's experiences as detailed in Robinson's seminal work, *The Original Vision* (1983), which grew out of Alister Hardy's research on spiritual experience.[1]

In terms of the built environment, Christian thinkers have frequently expressed unease with overt sacralisation, fearful of the danger of imbuing structures with intrinsic value that may usurp religious faith, relationship and action. Giles (2004) expresses his

[1] The Alister Hardy Society Religious Experience Research Centre is now based at the University of Wales, Lampeter; see http://www.lamp.ac.uk/aht/

ambivalence on this topic, strongly concerned that outmoded and unuseful church buildings are impeding the work of the church because of emotional attachments to "buildings which speak of a geriatric God incarcerated in an old folk's home"(p. 8), yet also admitting that believers have erected "countless buildings, all of which have a special character of their own, most of which enable their users to glimpse the glory of the Kingdom, and many of which bring people to their knees in wonder and thanksgiving to God" (p. 51).

In contrast, Inge sees church buildings as more than convenient gathering places for the work of the faithful, and suggests that they should be viewed as shrines. To explicate this provocative suggestion, he uses J. G. Taylor's description of a shrine's influence essentially as ingathering – gathering the experiences, languages and thoughts of faith communities and putting faith communities in touch with their sacred history (p. 114). In applying such a function to the local church structure, he asks rhetorically:

> Should not all churches be places wherein there is a history of divine self-communication, of 'sacramental encounters,' with the worshipping community that inhabits them? Should not their presence in the midst of that community nourish the faith of that community? Should they not proclaim to the secular world in which they stand that God is present and active in this world? (p. 115)

Both Inge and Giles agree that the house of the church has an active role in the life of the worshipping community. Giles writes that "we should never underestimate the influence of our building upon the way we think about God, about each other, and about the relative importance of the activity we have come together to engage in" (p. 57).

The faith community in which I live, worship and work would be uncomfortable with any language that includes the word 'sacrament' in relation to the building of the church. The notion of the 'meeting-house,' while not in common speech today,

nevertheless, still is present in the religious consciousness (to be explored below). However, the accepted understanding of the building as merely a place where the faithful gather is paradoxically undercut by the intense emotional attachment to buildings and their furnishings that is exhibited in older communities. Giles' tongue-in-cheek observation might apply here:

> In extreme cases, beleaguered reactionaries will admit to a preference for closure of the building, rather than see one stick or stone tampered with. By comparison, converting the whole congregation to Zoroastrianism would be a piece of cake. (p. 55)

I propose a theology of church building that resonates with Inge's understanding – that the individual building is a repository of the collective memory of God's action in the lives of those who have worshipped, worked and lived in that particular constructed environment – that place.

In connecting past, present and future, sacred architecture acts as symbol, sign and image. According to Jung, a symbol

> possesses specific connotations in addition to its conventional and obvious meaning. It implies something vague, unknown, or hidden from us.... Thus a word or an image is symbolic when it implies something more than its obvious and immediate meaning.... As the mind explores the symbol, it is led to ideas that lie beyond the grasp of reason. (in Barrie, 1994, p. 12)

Because language is often inadequate to represent metaphysical or religious knowing, humans have employed symbols for this purpose. Paul Tillich states that a symbol needs to possess 'perceptibility,' or the attribute of rendering the invisible visible (quoted in Barrie, 1994, p. 14). In an effort to convey the meaning of symbol more simply, Zimmerman defines a symbol as something that we can see "so that our eye can remind our heart" (1981, p. 18). According to Tillich, a religious symbol also has a communal aspect, requiring the attribute of 'acceptability' since, to have meaning, its significance

and power must be shared by the collective. Symbols serve to lead one to a deeper meaning that cannot be adequately communicated otherwise. In Jung's words, a symbol that is alive is 'pregnant with meaning' (quoted in Barrie, 1994, p. 13).

Symbols need to be distinguished from signs. Tillich distinguishes between the two by stating that a symbol has "a [innate] power inherent within it that distinguishes it from the mere sign which is impotent in itself" (quoted in Barrie, 1994, p. 13). Jung states that "a sign is always less than the concept it represents, while a symbol always stands for something more than its obvious and immediate meaning" (quoted in Barrie, 1994, p. 13). Rather than demoting the value of sign as Jung and Tillich tend to do, Norberg-Schulz (2000) offers a more helpful explanation and introduces the third element of 'image':

> While a sign has an indicative function, and a symbol functions through substitution, an image is something that is both new and rather peculiar. It represents nothing other than itself, but as Gadamer nicely puts it, it assembles a world and thus goes beyond its component elements. (p. 11)

The house of the church acts as a symbol of a particularised faith tradition visible in place; it functions as a sign pointing to its inter/action in the broader community in which it is emplaced; as it establishes its own identity within a geographic environment, it presents its exclusive image to the world.

Although the house of the church represents God's saving action to a people and God's saving work with a people, it does not follow that God is contained in a structure. Helen Oppenheimer comments on this issue: "Sundays and churches are not nearer to God or more excellent: they are fractions, set apart to represent the truth that all time and space are God's. The part is consecrated, not instead of the whole, but on behalf of the whole" (quoted in Inge, 2003, p. 86). Stephen Sykes echoes this understanding, "Thus a

holy place is set aside not in order to deny the holiness of other places, but for human perception to intensify the sanctification of all places. Because the church has been set aside, the bedroom is not therefore devoid of the divine presence'" (quoted in Inge, 2003, p. 87).

As I continue to refine a theology of sacred place and space, I find myself in sympathy with John Inge, the present Suffragan Bishop of Ely Cathedral. Although his religious world is far removed from the locus of my research – both geographically and ecclesiologically – his work articulates a theological position that speaks to our present condition. In a postmodern world driven by economic determinism, sacred architecture acts as a symbol of another approach to life and challenges secular assumptions.

Relationship of Worship and Place/Space

Worship has often been called "the heartbeat of the Church." It is the response expected of the created by the Creator God under the original covenant (e.g. Exodus 23:25; Deuteronomy 6:3) as well as under the new covenant (Romans 12:1; John 4:22-24). Worship is not only a duty, but also a spontaneous response to the generous goodness of a gracious God. It is through the nature and form of their worship that people express their theology of God – what they believe about the nature and being of God and their relationship to God.

Over the last several decades, a worship renewal movement has touched many corners of the western Christian church. The impetus for this movement has been the desire to provide a worship experience that appeals to the contemporary world in the face of the dramatic decline in church attendance throughout Europe and North America. Within the Roman Catholic tradition, this movement was unleashed by the Vatican II

Council, opened under Pope John XXIII in 1962; one of the first issues it addressed was the revision of the liturgy. Similar initiatives took place within the Anglican and Reformed communions. These movements resulted in new liturgies and orders of worship that were mandated for their respective constituencies, with very mixed responses from church attendees: some welcomed the new expressions while others abhorred them.

Within the Conservative Protestant church, the worship renewal movement has been experienced in a less directed manner. Because of their non-hierarchical denominational structure, churches within this tradition exercise individual authority in matters of polity; therefore, worship styles and format may vary dramatically from church to church within one denomination. While new churches founded by innovative pastoral leaders have had free reign in shaping their worship formats and growing congregations from the ranks of those attracted to their particular form, established churches have struggled to mediate between traditionalists and innovators. The result has not been a happy compromise in many instances, as evidenced by the now-ubiquitous phrase 'worship wars.' Much of the conflict, when it occurs, centres around music styles, with traditionalists favouring organ and choirs and innovators preferring worship teams, electronic instruments, percussion and vocal leaders. While controversy over worship styles has disturbed churches within the denomination in which this research project is situated, most of the interviewees come from churches which follow fairly traditional worship formats; music styles vary from classical to contemporary but most include organ and choirs.

The question that touches this project is, "What might be the relationship of worship, regardless of style, to the space in which it takes place?"

Some would suggest that there is little relationship. Harold Daniels states "worship should never be shaped by architecture" (quoted in Webber, 1994, p. 544). J. G. Davies says "the nature of Christian worship is such that it does not of itself require any particular architectural setting. It can be and has been celebrated in a dining room, a hospital ward, or an open field" (quoted in Hubbard, 2004, n. p.).

Others have quite a different view. Gregg Finley (1995), who has lovingly and minutely documented the Gothic revival churches of Victorian New Brunswick in his exquisite book, *On Earth as it is in Heaven*, has this to say:

> Churches are sacred structures designed to offer a hint of heaven's architecture. We acknowledge that God can neither be contained within human history nor confined to a building built by human hands. Although worship can happen anywhere, we also know that the Spirit of God can reside in the churches — small or large, simple or sublime — where people of faith gather. For generations, the church has been a place where people came to cry and laugh, pray and sing, doubt and decide, confess and rejoice, love and be loved — a place where people shared themselves with one another and gave themselves to God. (p. 13)

James White claims, "Every liturgical space reflects the theological commitments of its designers. Every time a liturgical space is used, those ideals shape the experience of those who worship within it. Space for worship must be designed with concern for the theological and liturgical commitments of a given worshiping community" (quoted in Webber, 1994, p. 546).

In response to Robert Webber's (1994) provocative claim, "The space of worship ultimately shapes the beliefs, sensibilities and understandings of those who worship in its confines" (p. 544), Richard Hubbard asks the searching question, "Can the environment

in which we worship actually change what we believe about what we are doing?" (Hubbard, 2004, n. p.).

Webber (1994) suggests three principles for the design of worship space. Worship space should: 1) convey the MYSTERY of God's transcendence and immanence; 2) convey HOSPITALITY, congeniality and warmth; and 3) enable PARTICIPATION of the people in both speech and movement (p. 545). I suggest a fourth principle: it should testify to the BEAUTY and GOODNESS of God. I see beauty and goodness as inseparable characteristics, reflected in the creation story in which everything that was created was judged "good" by God; in that every created thing was good and right for its place in creation, it was beautiful.

Thomas Barrie (1996) defines sacred architecture as "places built to symbolize the meanings and accommodate the rituals of the particular belief system of its time" (p. 5). Barrie suggests that meaning in sacred architecture occurs at three levels: first, the sites are an **overt representation** of aspects of the religion, expressed pictorially or symbolically; second, meaning is interpreted at a **deeper, abstract level** – at the unconscious level of the mind; and third, because religious beliefs are symbolized and enacted by rituals and ceremonies, there is often a close correspondence between rituals and architectural form – the building acts as **a stage** for the enactment of meaning.

Barrie's criteria for sacred buildings provide a useful rubric through which to explore Webber's principles as they are expressed in any particular worship space. How is the mystery of God's transcendence and immanence represented overtly through visual expression? What might be the unconscious interpretation of that representation or lack of it by those who enter that space? To what end does the building act as a stage for the

liturgies and celebrations which speak to a people's beliefs about their relationship to a transcendent and immanent God? We could ask the same questions about the principles of hospitality, human participation, and God's beauty and goodness.

Questions for a Worship Space

	Overt representation: pictorial or symbolic	Abstract meaning: unconscious	Stage for rituals: enactment of meaning
Mystery			
Hospitality			
Participation			
Beauty/Goodness			

Webber (1994), a recognised authority on the theory and practice of Christian worship, advances some thoughts on worship and worship space that will inform the terminology used in this project. He asserts:

> Those involved in contemporary worship renewal agree on three biblical teachings about the church and worship that informs all thought about worship space.
>
> 1. The church is people. The church is not a building, a denomination, a judicatory, but the people who assemble to worship.
> 2. The building in which worship takes place is the house of the people. It is not the house of God, as though it were where God dwells. God dwells in the people and is present in their assembly.
> 3. Worship is the action of the entire people of God. It is not something done to the people or for the people by a special class of ordained clergy. Worship is the work of the people. (p. 544)

These assumptions are accepted widely throughout the faith tradition from which this research is drawn. Accordingly, the central terms for this project will be defined in agreement with Webber's assumptions.

In his work on worship space, Giles (2004) follows Webber's line of thought. He states:

> As already noted, we have also gone along with the custom of using the same word to describe both the assembly – the church – and for the building in which the assembly meets. We have thereby greatly devalued the New Testament concept of the assembly of believers as living stones of the new temple not made with hands, and we urgently need to restore it to its primary place in our vision of God's call to us. (p. 88)

The language and theology are based in scriptural references such as: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? … For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple" (1 Corinthians 3: 16); and "like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house" (1 Peter 5a). Giles proposes Peter Hammond's use of the term "the house of the church" to refer to the building, quoting Hammond: "The church building is the house of the church…the house of the people who are themselves the temple of the living God. It has no meaning apart from the community it serves." (quoted in Giles, p. 88). This designation has scriptural precedence, "Aquila and Prisca, together with *the church in their house,* greet you warmly in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 16: 19, emphasis mine).

Because I appreciate the theological foundation of the term "the house of the church," I have chosen to use it for the buildings in which worship and religious education take place. However, other writers who have informed my research use a variety of terms which may or may not be coterminous with the house of the church. These include sacred architecture, sacred building, sacred space and sacred place. For instance, Barrie (1996) defines sacred architecture as "places built to symbolize the meanings and accommodate the rituals of the particular belief system of its time" (p. 1). When referring to the work of other writers, I use their chosen terminology.

The Webber-Barrie rubric, informed by the accompanied theological understanding, will be the prism through which I consider the lifeworld existentials as experienced by the participants in this research.

Sacred Architecture: the Language of Holiness

Poets, priests and peasants have long testified to the power of sacred buildings to speak of the numinous and the ineffable. Indeed, Bachelard (1964) claims, "Through poems, perhaps more than through recollections, we touch the ultimate poetic depth of the space of the house [I would add church]" (p. 6). I conclude this chapter with a few poetic offerings.

At the International Pavilion in the Epcot Center in Florida, I wandered into a replica of a "stave church," the traditional wooden church of ancient Norway, and came across an exquisite poem by the Norwegian poet, Paal-Helge Haugen:

> Still it stands here, like a sign
> in the half-light, leaning against the edge of history
> on the bare, polished stone skull of a homeland.
> High up the old openings: tiny gateways for the day
> portholes worn and splintered by the light forcing its way in
> for eight hundred years.
> Here is the world's secret central pillar.
> Here God's crofters gathered.
> Here they warmed themselves by a little fire of faith.
> whilst the frost tore at sinews and walls: a frosted Kyrie
> cautiously breathed out beneath crossbeams and rafters
> in a temporary heaven.
> Here life and death met: two sides of a thin door panel
> worn by hands tracing over the mystery.
> Life hidden in the lifeless body on the crucifix.
>
> Death, hourglass-shaped, present in the font's pedestal,
> Someone came here, shouldering a man's load
> of visions, spread them out over walls and pillars, gaping beasts
> angels' wings, dragons out under the knife the hand the brush:
> tendrils of ochre, red, grey, white, a sinuous short way

from paradise to damnation
Jesus' fathomless eyes and the demon's nostrils.

After three hundred thousand mornings yet another morning
on its way through the universe.
In a cool walkway, on a pillar, under the brim of the roof
dawns the face of an unknown animal.
It has come here from the dreams
of one of your forefathers. (Haugen, 1994)

Haugen writes of the haunting light to be found in these churches, "'The stave church poem is built on intimate knowledge of these astonishing structures, and long hours spent in those spaces filled with what has been described as "dark light": an atmosphere I haven't found anywhere else'" (Haugen).[2]

Abbé Suger, who authorised the building of the Cathedral of St. Denis near Paris, one of the first Gothic-style cathedrals in Europe, also wrote about the "mysticism of light." Dramatic developments in architecture in the twelfth century, namely, the devices of the flying buttress, the pointed arch and the ribbed vault, had made possible the extensive window space and awesome height of the great cathedrals (Vyverberg, 1988, p. 164). For Suger, the light that streamed in through the massive windows was an indicator of God's presence and power flooding into the church from on high; light was seen as "the mediator between God and humanity" (Bracons, 1990, p. 25). Kenneth Clark (1969), in his book, *Civilisation*, comments that "the Gothic cathedrals were hymns to the divine light" (p. 96). Suger wrote:

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[2] In a note from Betsy Mayer, WDW Online Communications, she writes, "The poem was translated into English by Janet Garton specifically for our exhibition. We have the English translation (we have no poem title), however, it is now available to the public through Disney. To quote Mr. Haugen: 'The stave church poem is built on intimate knowledge of these astonishing structures, and long hours spent in those spaces filled with what has been described as "dark light": an atmosphere I haven't found anywhere else. The two stave churches I value highest are Borgund and Urnes, both in the county of Sogn og Fjordane in western Norway - and I'm sure there are one or two echoes from these particular churches to be found in my text.'" Email received on 8 June 2005 from: guest.mail@wdw.disneyonline.com.

> When the house of God, many colored as the radiance of precious stones, called me from the cares of this world, then my soul from the material to the immaterial, and I seemed to find myself, as it were, in some strange part of the universe, which was neither wholly of the baseness of the earth, nor wholly of the serenity of heaven, but by the Grace of God I seemed lifted in a mystic manner from this lower toward the upper sphere. (Gombrich, 1966, p. 134)

In a similar vein, an adult man who grew up in Halifax, Nova Scotia, recalls his feelings as a child attending _____ Roman Catholic Church, "Upstairs was filled with sunlight; when the light came in, you just felt that God was right there with you." He also said that whenever he was in church it always felt like the sun was shining, whether it was night or day.

Carl Sandburg, the quintessential American poet of the first half of the twentieth century, included the following stanza in "For You":

> The peace of great churches be for you,
> Where the players of lofty pipe organs
> Practice old lovely fragments, alone. (Trapp, 1964, p. 61)

Not only great churches and cathedrals but also more modest structures have the power to speak to one's spirit. The poet E. E. Cummings aspired only to be a "little church" in his poem "i am a little church (no great cathedral)":

> i am a little church (no great cathedral)
> far from the splendor and squalor of hurrying cities
> – i do not worry if briefer days grow briefest,
> i am not sorry when sun and rain make april
>
> my life is the life of the reaper and the sower:
> my prayers are prayers of earth's own clumsily striving
> (finding and losing and laughing and crying) children
> whose any sadness or joy is my grief or my gladness
>
> around me surges a miracle of unceasing
> birth and glory and death and resurrection:
> over my sleeping self float flaming symbols
> of hope, and i wake to a perfect patience of mountains

i am a little church (far from the frantic
world with its rapture and anguish) at peace with nature
– i do not worry if longer nights grow longest;
i am not sorry when silence becomes singing

winter by spring, i lift my diminutive spire to
merciful Him Whose only now is forever:
standing erect in the deathless truth of His presence
(welcoming humbly His light and proudly His darkness). (Trapp, 1964, p. 201)

In a more contemporary vein, eight-year-old Addison wrote a poem to express her feelings about what happens in the space of her church:

Church

I like church.
Do You like church?
you sing!
you learn
and more importantly
you
have
fun ! ! !

It must also be acknowledged that people have undoubtedly experienced church buildings as dour, forbidding and depressing, although I have not discovered poetic expression of such responses. Working from my theological perspective, I would suggest that the environments engendering such emotional responses have failed through structure and relationship to fulfil the purpose of sacred architecture.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have attempted to present a perspective on 'sacred' space and place, focussing specifically on philosophical and theological thinking that has shaped a view germane to the setting in which this research is situated. The horizon of meaning of the community being researched is formed by the Judaeo-Christian canon and tradition in

general, and the Canadian Maritime free church tradition in particular; in addition, the understanding of religious place and space is informed by the theology of worship.

I have also introduced Webber's principles of the design of worship space, which include mystery, hospitality and participation, and suggested the addition of beauty and goodness as a fourth principle. Webber's three principles would find ready acceptance within my faith tradition; the recognition of beauty as a requisite for an acceptable worship space would be more tenuous, as the background on Maritime ecclesiastical architecture indicates. Barrie approaches sacred architecture from a more abstract perspective, suggesting that meaning is conveyed at three levels: in overt representation, at a deeper, abstract level, and as a stage for the enactment of rituals and ceremonies. Combining both sets of criteria creates a rubric through which I will consider the Maritime ecclesiastical architecture as experienced by the children interviewed.

One of my interests in this research is exploring how children's spirituality is expressed through their experiences of the house of the church. Considering this question begs the further question of what is meant by 'children's spirituality.' It is to this issue I now turn.

CHAPTER IV: TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE SPIRIT OF THE CHILD

In this chapter, I explore the juxtaposition of two streams of thinking about the state of childhood that inform adult perceptions of the child's spiritual state. I will also review some of the most salient current contributions to the discourse on spirituality and religious knowing. The discussion of these various factors will outline my conceptual understanding of the spirituality of children that informs my own research.

Throughout the last century, two distinct lines of approach to the spirituality of the child are traceable in the western world. Early in the twentieth century, Maria Montessori advocated a fresh new approach to the education of children. Coming from a devout Roman Catholic background, with medical and psychological training, Montessori believed in a wholistic approach to the nurture of the child, in which spiritual concerns were as important a component as the cognitive and psychological. Parallel to her approach and influence was the research and work of developmentalists such as Jean Piaget, Ronald Goldman, Lawrence Kohlberg, James Fowler, Fritz Oser and Robert Kegan who focussed on cognitive and cognitive-psychological development. Other influential thinkers such as Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson stressed psychological factors in human development.

Although Montessori's approach continued to exert limited influence in religious circles through one of her disciples and colleagues, Sofia Cavalletti, it was the developmental track that gained dominance throughout much of the twentieth century. However, recent research into, and thinking about, the spiritual lives of children has suggested that children have profound spiritual experiences and express spiritual insights that do not fit into generally accepted patterns of childhood development.

Human Development and Spiritual Experience

When I began intentionally to explore children's spirituality about a decade ago, the then-current literature on the state of childhood revealed a common disregard for the spiritual aspect of the human condition. Typical of this genre of books was Melvin Konner's otherwise powerful tome, *Childhood* (Konner, 1991). Tied to the public television series "Childhood," this book was intended by the publishers to be "a book about the *total* experience of childhood" (p. xiii, emphasis mine). Although one chapter was devoted to the strong moral sense and development of children, any spiritual reflection was limited to four pages (out of a total of 481pages) at the end of a chapter and mainly emphasised children's attitudes to death. Even there, the material was taken almost entirely from Cole's seminal book, *The Spiritual Life of Children* (Coles, 1990), which was at once condescendingly and paradoxically described:

> Although it *cannot take the place of systematic research*, we are fortunate to have the work of Robert Coles, also a Harvard Psychiatrist, whose sensitive interviews of children — especially children facing racism, poverty, and other stresses — have produced a series of books that *have enriched our view of childhood almost incomparably* (emphasis mine). (Konner, 1991, p. 328)

As a respected anthropologist and writer, who had carefully documented the lives of cultures such as the !Kung of Saharan Africa, Konner overlooked an integral aspect of children all over the world, which, given his extraordinary insight into and sensitivity to children's issues, was surprising and disappointing.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the landscape looks quite different. The topic of children's spirituality has become so popular that the North American scene is littered with a wide array of religious, educational and popular materials that purport to help parents and educators meet their children's spiritual needs. As Joyce Ann Mercer

has established in her recent article (2006), children's spirituality has become a significant for-profit enterprise in the North American consumer culture as an aspect of the commodification of childhood, with global repercussions. This trend was corroborated by a recent search (23 June 2007) on the site of the Internet retailer, Amazon.ca, which returned over 700 products under the category "children's spirituality;" over 1100 products were listed by the American parent company, Amazon.com.

The popularisation of children's spirituality has been accompanied over the past decade by significant academic attention from those who are concerned for children's welfare. This interest has been reflected in the production of numerous books and articles, the launching of *The International Journal of Children's Spirituality* in 1996 and regular conferences on children's spirituality with both multi-cultural and specific Christian emphases.

Some of the most vigorous discussion on the nature of spirituality has emerged from the United Kingdom, prompted by the 1988 Education Reform Act which mandated that schools provide Religious Education to promote "the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society" (Education Reform Act, UK, 1988). In an increasingly pluralist society such as the UK, this educational requirement has sparked a great deal of debate and controversy, as well as ground-breaking research into the nature of spirituality in general and children's spirituality in particular, as educators have sought to find common elements for the classroom.

The approach in Canada and the U. S. A., both of which have a history of the separation of church and state, has focussed primarily on religious training by various

faith groups for their own adherents. Within the Canadian public school system, the subject of religion (when addressed) is generally connected to the social studies curriculum (Valk, 1998). Valk claims that the renewed attention is focused not on teaching religion *per se*, but on teaching about religion and its importance both in historical change and in current political, economic, and cultural movements. Within the publicly-funded Separate School system and in sectarian private schools, provision is made for religious education within the classroom (Barman & Edwards, 2007; Wilson, 2007).

Both within secular and faith-based educational systems, the dominant influence in religious education over the past century has been that of the developmentalists. Rebecca Nye and David Hay, two British researchers who have written perceptively about this trend (Nye and Hay, 1996; Hay and Nye, 1998), suggest that the strength and self-confidence of cognitive psychology may explain the dominant influence of cognitive development theory in the field of religious research and education. In another article Hay, Nye and Murphy (1996) contest that such excessive concern with intellectual development has encouraged and perhaps led to an impoverishment of the meaning of the phrase "religious knowledge" and to a focus on specific kinds of religious language as indicators of spirituality that are limiting to the range and depth of spiritual experience, especially that of children.

In terms of general development, the theories of developmental psychologists have certainly provided insight into the human condition. Research has confirmed that human beings develop in a general progression from childhood to adolescence and to adulthood, in psychosocial (Erikson, 1963), cognitive (Piaget, 1928, 1965), moral

(Kohlberg, 1981, 1984), religious (Fowler, 1981; Oser & Gmünder, 1991) and self (Kegan, 1982) understanding and skills. [3]

From a religious and moral perspective, we can observe that, from birth to about age two, children are learning to respond to their environment. They are developing trust in their caregivers which becomes their foundation for trust in God. From the age of four to seven they begin to learn the concept of right and wrong which at this age is based primarily on custom and habit. During the years between eight and twelve the developing ability to think abstractly enables children to think about a God-concept and to make independent moral choices. During the adolescent years self-identity and self-confidence are built and the individual grows increasingly conscious of the "other" and of God. This progression is the goal; however, environmental and personal factors can and often do influence the maturation process at any stage. Understanding the general pattern of spiritual growth has the potential of assisting the religious and moral educator in providing age-appropriate opportunities to foster personal spiritual growth as well as sensitivity towards other spiritual paths.

While acknowledging a general linear development of human beings in the moral and religious realm, it is apparent that children's spiritual experiences do not always fit so neatly into this scheme. Careful observers of children have discerned this discrepancy over the past century, but often with little academic acknowledgment. Swimming against the tide of a cognitive-oriented, Cartesian understanding of human development have been a number of child-observers who laid the basis for an alternative view of the spirit of the child.

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[3] See Appendix for an outline of chronological developmental progression proposed by five influential developmentalists: Erikson, Piaget, Kohlberg, Fowler and Kegan.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, early in the twentieth century, the paediatrician Maria Montessori paid particular attention to the spiritual lives of young children. A life-time of close observation led her to the conclusion that little children's souls "seem to be more open than those of adults to divine intuitions, despite their less perfectly developed intelligence and skill in reasoning," and that children should be educated in an environment in which they "would be quite free in the expression of their religious instincts" (Standing, 1965). She went so far as to claim that, in failing to do so, "We may even suffocate life itself" (Montessori, 1967).

The freedom and spontaneity in which very young children, some from quite unreligious families, appeared to express genuine spiritual feelings or insights attests to the respect extended to them by Montessori teachers. One story illustrates this:

> A group of children between the ages of six and seven were meditating together with the catechist.... All the children were holding little candles in their hands that had been lit from the paschal candle, symbol of the risen Christ. The catechist wanted to help the children's meditation and spoke about the beauty of that "light" they had received, but Agnese constantly corrected her, saying: "It isn't light; it's goodness," as if the goodness were more visible to her than the light itself. (Cavalletti, 1992, p. 43)

Such a statement represents an independent abstract concept, which is quite unusual (in the standard developmental framework) for a child of this age. From many stories of this nature, it appears that when children are given the encouragement and opportunity to be thoughtful and quiet — in other words, to meditate — they are open to and capable of remarkable spiritual insight, beyond their years. Montessori (1967) claimed "silence and controlled movements can lead to an inner sensibility known as a 'religious,' or 'spiritual sense'" (p. 323) She also maintained that children are extremely "receptive" and that an environment that touches their senses exercises a strong influence on them (p. 323).

Although Montessori's philosophy of early childhood education gained support and a loyal following around the world, it has not been as pervasive as its success in the classroom would merit. This lack of pervasiveness may be due in part to the very specialized training required of prospective teachers, but also may be related to the fact that, in terms of religious education, her approach is so firmly rooted in Roman Catholicism. This particularity may dissuade some religious educators, but her principles are readily transferable to both Christian traditions and other faiths.

One of her disciples, Sofia Cavalletti, continued Montessori's tradition of rigorous observation and thoughtfulness toward the spiritual child, which she shared in *The Religious Potential of the Child* (1992). Although this book intentionally presented a religious education curriculum (on a Roman Catholic foundation), it also presented her careful and insightful observations of the spiritual experiences of the children with whom she worked for nearly forty years, and the pedagogical reflections they engendered. This legacy has continued through the work and writings of the influential American religious educators, Jerome Berryman (1991), and Sonja Stewart (1989) — both of whom structured educational and worship programs for Protestant denominations on Cavalletti's work. These programs are based on a meditative atmosphere and emphasize individual thoughtfulness and the development of the imagination.

Within the last twenty-five years, two independent research studies without religious affiliation have provided us with a glimpse into the inner lives of children. The studies by Edward Robinson from England and by Robert Coles from the United States have been watershed studies in the field of children's spirituality and have provided the catalyst for innovative research.

The first, *The Original Vision*, was undertaken by Robinson (1983) on the basis of over 4000 replies sent in to the Religious Experience Research Unit in Oxford, recording accounts of religious experiences of adults. Robinson discovered that approximately 15% of the accounts were reminiscences of events occurring in childhood; his book is a remarkable record of the significant experiences of these individuals. It has been argued that his work's major weakness rests on the fact that he depended for his data on reminiscences of childhood by adults, some of whom were very elderly — raising questions of reliability and elaboration (Hay, Nye and Murphy, 1996). On the other hand, it is only with the increased competence of language that a person may begin to express and to reflect on the experience that occurred many years earlier.

To read these recollections is to be impressed by the intensity of the recalled experiences — their impact has not diminished in time. Some general observations of these accounts are that many feelings were too intense to be shared, or if shared with adults were belittled or dismissed; formalized religion (especially through liturgy, community and sacred place) may authenticate a prior religious feeling or experience, or may inhibit or destroy a child's openness to the transcendent; spiritual experiences were usually prior or unrelated to any religious training.

The following are examples of such recollections from *The Original Vision*:

> The most profound experience of my life came to me when I was very young — between four and five years old. I am not mistaken in dating this because I remember so clearly both the place where it occurred and the shoes I was wearing at the time.... My mother and I were walking on a stretch of land in Pangbourne Berks, known locally as "the moors." As the sun declined and the slight chill of evening came on, a pearly mist formed over the ground.... Suddenly I seemed to see the mist as a shimmering gossamer tissue and the harebells, appearing here and there, seemed to shine with a brilliant fire. Somehow I understood that this was the living tissue of life itself, in which that which we call consciousness was embedded, appearing here and there as a shining focus of

> energy in the more diffused whole. In that moment I knew that I had my own special place, as had all other things, animate and so-called inanimate, and that we were all part of this universal tissue which was both fragile yet immensely strong, and utterly good and beneficent. The vision has never left me. It is as clear today as fifty years ago, and with it the same intense feeling of love of the world and the certainty of ultimate good. It gave me then a strong, clear sense of identity which has withstood many vicissitudes, and an affinity with plants, birds, animals, even insects, and people too, which has often been commented upon. Moreover, the whole of this experience has ever since formed a kind of reservoir of strength fed from an unseen source, from which quite suddenly in the midst of the very darkest times a bubble of pure joy rises through it all, and I know that whatever the anguish there is some deep centre in my life which cannot be touched by it. Of course, at the early age of four or five I could not have expressed anything of the experience in the words I have now used, and perhaps the attempt to convey the absorption of myself into the whole, and the intensity of meaning, it sounds merely over-coloured to the reader. But the point is that, by whatever mysterious perception, the whole impression and its total meaning were apprehended in a single instant. (F. 57)

> I turned to books increasingly for companionship, searching for expressions of experience similar to my own, both as to the beauty of the natural world, and my own sense of something beyond it, a timeless eternal "something" behind natural phenomena... Early in my teens I discovered Richard Jefferies, Henry Williamson and Traherne, and felt strong comfort from knowing that others— and adults — experienced these strange feelings, which I never mentioned to any person, though I have no idea why not. They seemed too precious and personal — a sort of talisman to be treasured in private. (F. 58)

> Church worship with its moments of mystery and the beautiful half-comprehended language used to summarize pain and fear, and express hope and reassurance: it evoked and nourished some fundamental response that no other area of experience catered for. (F. 34)

In his introduction to Robinson's book, John Westerhoff suggested a few implications of this study. First, he underscored the methodology of "cultural anthropology" (phenomenologically-oriented) as particularly appropriate for the study of religion and the religious. He also recommended Robinson's approach as a useful and necessary alternative to the dominant theory of developmentalism with its concerns for predictability, universality and control; religious experience, he pointed out, is always personal and particular, rarely predictable and never controllable. Westerhoff affirmed

Robinson's assumption that "children have a natural capacity for insight, imagination, understanding and knowing that does not need to develop into some higher form." Because of our culture's limited view of children's ways of knowing, we have set adult learning and education over against childhood learning and education, with a resulting disservice to children. "Since children do not think intellectually (abstractly), they do not think; since they do not know rationally, they do not know. Their subjective experiences and intuitive ways of knowing are depreciated; their ability to perceive or understand the real world is questioned. But,... maturity is the integration of these polar opposites." In this respect, Westerhoff echoed the thoughts of David Kennedy about the place of the child in western wisdom tradition — in particular, Kennedy's contention that the child's wisdom resides in being, rather than in knowing in a rational sense. (Kennedy, n.d.) This spiritual significance of the child was highly valued by the Romantic poets of the nineteenth century, with whom some of Robinson's respondents found spiritual identification. Westerhoff discovered in Robinson's findings an imperative for an increased use of arts and the aesthetic in religious education not only for children but also for adults; children especially should be provided with opportunities to have their imaginations enhanced because it is through their imaginations that they first experience the holy. In relation to this observation, it is interesting to note the increasing number of articles and books on the place and the use of the imagination in education and personal development in the last few decades.

More recently, Daniel Scott (University of Victoria, Canada) presented his reflections on a similar, more modest study of the spiritual experiences of children and youth based on a collection of twenty-two written accounts, three by men, nineteen by

women, of events that occurred between the ages of eight and ten. Scott (2004) acknowledged the problematic issue of retrospective memories, which may or may not have been altered over time, but he asserted:

> They are constructs and self-presentations. It is their persistence and potency in the lives of the tellers that strike me as important. They are significant memories that are often credited with life changing power. (p. 68)

For his book *The Spiritual Life of Children*, Coles (1990) undertook the first major phenomenological study of children themselves in respect to their spiritual lives and experiences. This project extended over many years and took him, his wife and sons to North, Central and South America, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa to interview children from Christian, Islamic and Jewish faiths, or no faith. Coles rhetorically established the goals of his project, "Do I risk pomposity when I describe this work as phenomenological and existential rather than geared toward psychopathology, or toward the abstractions that go with 'stage theory,' with 'levels' of 'development'?" (p. 39). Carefully researched and documented, it remains a monumental effort of phenomenological research and free of interpretive comment. In its pages, we taste the rich and dynamic variety of spiritual experiences that children have and which constantly cross developmental boundaries. One such example of insight beyond her years: "An eight-year-old Jewish girl who lives just outside Boston told me, when I was trying to get my bearings in this research effort, that she could 'feel Him nearby a lot of times,' and that she hoped He'd stay near until 'He's so close I can hear Him,' at which point, she indicated, she'd not longer be here, alive" (p. 36).

Some of the concepts that Coles explored with his young theologians are the face and voice of God, philosophical reflections, and visionary moments. In his frank and

sensitive conversations with children, he discovered that the questions "Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?" are "the eternal questions children ask more intensely, unremittingly, and subtly than we sometimes imagine" (p. 37). His recorded conversations are a convincing testimony to the rigorous honesty with which children address these issues and to how they integrate their beliefs into their lives. Even children raised in completely secular homes seriously engage these questions. Especially in devout homes, Coles discovered that children "will make a complete psychological engagement" with God. "The child will love God, spurn God, fight for God, obey God, angrily disobey God" (p. 127). A statement made by a young girl that "God is in heaven, but He is in my mind, too," represented for Coles a definitive analysis of the relationship between young spirituality and young psychology — a fusion (p. 128).

Konner (1991) retells one of the more poignant stories in an abbreviated form in *Childhood.*

> An eleven-year-old named Leah became ill with leukemia after Coles had gotten to know her, and as she lay dying she impressed all who knew her with her faith. Her family was with her, but so were her favorite Psalms, which she read to herself and, when she had become too sick, her family read for her. Through the agony of severe disease and fruitless but painful and destructive chemotherapy, she took comfort from the Psalms and from the Jewish people's history of suffering. "Leah is part of Israel," was how her father summed it up. There was nothing fanatical about her; she also loved to hear her mother sing the old popular dance song "Three O'Clock in the Morning," which Leah had once learned from her grandmother. But just before she entered her final coma, her eyes and mind still very alert, she told her father she would like to go to "that 'high rock,' " an allusion to Psalm 61. Later while she was unconscious and losing her hold on life, her father read it again and again:
> *Hear my cry, O God;*
> *Attend unto my prayer.*
> *From the end of the earth will I call unto Thee, when my heart faints;*
> *Lead me to a rock that is too high for me.*
> ... Leah, age eleven, facing death with all her mind and heart. (p. 331)

Thinking/Asking about Children's Spirituality

In contemplating a non-Cartesian approach to children's spirituality, questions beg to be asked concerning the concept and methodology. A number of creative researchers have suggested a way forward. The earliest was a little-noted paper, "Profound Childhood Religious Experience," presented in 1985 to the American Psychological Association (Armstrong, 1985). Armstrong offered a brief, but succinct, analysis of issues and challenges facing such research. Like Hay, Nye and Murphy (1996), Armstrong strongly questioned the validity of cognitive and psychoanalytic models. He proposed instead a perspective taken from the biographical and autobiographical studies of the childhoods of religious figures throughout history, formal religious studies of adults remembering deep religious experiences from their childhood and children reporting on their own experiences. Armstrong identified these experiences as revealing "states of ecstasy, wonder, awe, numinousness, unity, light, and compassion," (p. 1) which have been preserved in the poetical writings of the West as well as the sacred writings of the East. Armstrong then suggested a "hidden" line of development as an alternative to the traditional Piagetian line. A development with its roots in the Self and described as "from the spirit down," indicating a journey from a "high/broader/deeper/more comprehensive level of nonmaterial existence," as opposed to "from the body up" line of development (pp. 6-7). He commented on the probable difficulty of eliciting profound experiences from people, especially children, who actually might be unaware of deep religious experiences they have had, given our society's discounting of their validity and I might add, the strong rationalism that pervades much of our society. From a wealth of literary figures, Armstrong included the memory of the

French novelist, Julian Green (introduced in Chapter II, but repeated here as pertinent to the present discussion), recalling his fifth or sixth year of life:

> From these years gone by, I retain the memory of a moment of ecstasy such as I have never known since. Should we mention such things or conceal them? At this moment then, I raised my head towards the window, and looked out at the dark sky lit up by a few stars. How can I describe what is beyond the power of words. That moment was perhaps the most important in my life, and I do not know what to say about it. I was alone in a dark room, looking at the sky, and I felt what I can only call an élan of love. I have loved since, but never quite like that, without knowing that I was doing it. Somehow I knew He was there, looking at me and loving me too. How did this thought dawn in my mind? I do not know. I was sure that Some One was there, speaking to me without words. With that I have said everything. Why must I write that I have never found in any human discourse what I was allowed to feel then for about ten seconds, when I could hardly put three intelligible words together, and did not realize my own existence? Why am I obliged to set down that for years I forgot that moment, the torrent of days and nights almost obliterating it from memory? Would I had remembered in hours of trial! Why has its recollection come back to me now? What does all that mean? (p. 3)

British researchers Hay and Nye have given more rigorous attention to the challenge of how to approach research in "Identifying children's spirituality: how do you start without a starting point?" (Nye and Hay, 1996). The authors concern themselves with two questions that must be addressed if further research into the nature of children's spirituality is to speak with any clarity to the needs of educators: "What conceptual boundaries can be set to the term 'spirituality'? How can we identify categories of children's experience which belongs to this reality?" Their reflections on these two questions have provided the starting point for much of the subsequent inquiry into children's spirituality in the past decade.

In response to the first question, Nye and Hay (1996) "conceive of an innate spiritual capacity in childhood, but recognise that this may focus in particular ways and take different and changing forms as children's other capacities develop" (p. 145). In

reply to the second question, they propose a set of three interrelated dimensions of spiritual sensitivity: **awareness sensing, mystery sensing and value sensing.** These three broad "meta-processes" are further defined by sub-categories as follows: **awareness sensing** including the experience of being in the "here and now," "tuning" as in heightened aesthetic experience, "flow" as in the experience of concentrated attention, and "focusing" on the 'felt sense' of situation; **mystery sensing** including "wonder and awe" and "imagination" accessed through metaphors, symbols, stories and liturgies; **value sensing** which emphasizes the role played by emotion in spirituality including "delight and despair," the sense of "ultimate goodness," and "meaning" as it is found in the activity of meaning-making and meaning-sensing by children.

Arising from further research with children, Nye added the fourth dimension of **relational consciousness** (the relationships which the child makes with other people as well as with the world around) as central to the child's spiritual experience (Hay & Nye, 1998). These dimensions have informed a diversified and eclectic number of studies around the world in children's spirituality: Bosacki (2001), Champagne (2001) and Scott (2004) in Canada; Wong in Hong Kong (2001); Hyde (2005b) in Australia; May, Posterski, Stonehouse & Cannell (2005) in the United States and Canada. Such an approach is useful in exploring spirituality with children of all or no faith backgrounds.

In another provocative article, Hay, Nye and Murphy (1996) turned their attention to further research questions, "Thinking about childhood spirituality: review of research and current directions." Pertinent issues included: At what stage of life do spiritual experiences first manifest themselves? Might the development of a mature understanding of one's spirituality be suppressed or repressed out of consciousness in a highly

secularized society? What is the role of religious ritual among mentally handicapped individuals (there appears to be a strong correlation here)? In what form do children hold spiritual experiences in the time before they are able to reflect on them fully? How (if at all) do children articulate or at least store such memories which are later recalled as spiritually significant? How many experiences might be forgotten in the absence of any context which allows their expression?

In arguing for a new theory of spirituality to replace the narrower cognitive theory, Hay, Nye and Murphy (1996) drew on the reflections of Helmut Reich and applied his five criteria for religious development to children's spirituality. These include consideration of psychological processes, co-ordination between the psyche and the biophysical, sociocultural and perceived spirituality, the relationship of social contexts to the individual's spirituality, universal as well as individual features of spirituality and the mechanisms by which change occurs. These criteria offer a much-needed platform for the development of a wholistic, child-centred theory of spirituality, which also leaves room for the numinous, or God-given.

Religious Knowing

In religious education as in much secular education, Cartesian tenets characterise the educational process. Mauro Grün averred, drawing on the work of C. A. Bowers, "although Descartes' legacy has undergone important modifications, we are still, at the deepest level of our thought process, Cartesian thinkers" (Grün, 2005, p. 157). 'Knowing' in the Cartesian-Kantian tradition is a matter of "turning the chaotic influx of experience into a knowable (i.e., orderly) universe" through Human Reason (Jardine, 1998, p. 106).

To know something in Western culture is to objectify, quantify, organise, systematise, schematise and categorise.

Certainly, in most Christian education programs (I cannot presume to speak for other faith traditions), the emphasis is on teaching children the tenets and stories of the faith. The outward shape of children's religious education in North America may be deceivingly creative and interactive and experiential; children's educator, Ivy Beckwith (2004), observed sadly that "many children's ministry professionals talk about the need to make their children's ministries 'fun' and the pressure directors feel to "continually provide bigger, better, and glitzier programs" (pp. 10, 11). However, under the guise of entertainment, the agenda remains essentially a modernist agenda: to produce knowledge *about* the faith.

The eminent Roman Catholic educator, Thomas Groome (1998), provided us with a richer and fuller understanding of 'knowing.' While recognising the integral role of reason in human endeavour, he nevertheless proposed that knowing should not be reduced to reason alone, but should engage the whole person.

> Human feelings and emotions, productivity and creativity, the personal and social, the individual and relational, the spiritual and ethical, corporeality and sexuality, memory and imagination as well as reason – every aspect of human being – should be honored as a valued way of knowing and source of knowledge. (p. 285)

This approach helps to overcome the destructive dualisms rampant in Western epistemology, for example, mind/body, subject/object, thought/emotion, theoretical/practical. In effect, Groome's reflections recovered the Hebrew notion of the human being as a unified whole – body, mind, spirit – and the biblical foundation of knowing which is rooted in everyday experiences, relationships and efforts to live the covenant – to do God's will. The biblical understanding of 'knowing' is based on love –

to love and to be loved. When the psalmist prayed "O God, you have searched me and known me" (Psalm 139:1), he or she was really saying, "You love me as I am." St. Paul articulated the ultimate hope for human knowing, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly [or in a riddle], but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

To understand 'knowing' in a more generous way influences one's approach to children's spirituality. When knowing is based on experience and relationships, it ceases to privilege the adult at the expense of the child, giving validity to the child's way of knowing. Research in the field of neurobiology seems to support this mode of knowing. In *Hare Brain, Tortoise Mind*, David Claxton reviewed a large body of work in cognitive science, and concluded that the mind has two modes of thinking which he distinguished as 'd-mode' associated with conscious, deliberate, purposeful thinking, and 'slow ways of knowing' which included the aspects of insight, intuition and wisdom. He suggested that both modes of thinking had their place:

> D-mode must be developed and refined, but so must be powers of intuition and imagination, of careful, non-verbal observation, of listening to the body, of detecting (without harvesting them too quickly) small seeds of insight, of basking in the mythic world of dream and reverie, of being moved without knowing why. (quoted in Lewis, 2000, p. 274)

The poet, William Blake, conveyed this sense of knowing:

> To see a world in a grain of sand
> And a heaven in a wild flower
> Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
> And eternity in an hour. (William Blake, quoted in Lewis, p. 267)

Work continues in this emerging field of science with the popular works of Newberg, D'Aquili & Rause (2001) and Pierce (2002) being among the most provocative.

What appears indisputable is that every human being is born "spiritual." It is one of the attributes of being human. As Lewis (2000) noted, a variety of scholars have produced "taxonomies of the spiritual person, all of which carry a great deal of similarity and all of which claim to apply to all people irrespective of religious belief" (p. 279). However, like other human attributes – imagination, a reflective mind – spirituality needs the right environment to flourish. Some children have such profound spiritual experiences early in life that they are sustained throughout life, as the narratives explored by Edward Robinson and Daniel Scott have revealed. However, for many others, spiritual awareness can be smothered by the insensitivity, callowness and relentless materialism of their emotional and physical support environment.

Educators and philosophers remain divided over how best to nurture spiritual qualities. Some, such as David Carr (1996), argue that spirituality has always been located within religious traditions and that the word is incoherent outside of a tradition; hence, spiritual truths and beliefs can be accessed only within such a tradition. Others, such as Lewis (2000) claim that "established religious traditions are not necessarily the place for an authentically spiritual education" (p. 271) and recommend that the educational system could be better utilised to foster "empathetic understanding of Other, self, world and nature" (p. 278). While I am painfully aware of the failures of the major religious traditions (including my own – Christianity) to provide consistently a medium through which to foster a healthy spirituality, I remain committed to working within my own faith tradition to strengthen the rich practices for spiritual formation that are available.

Chapter Summary

While hints of a more wholistic approach to children's spiritual lives have been given for the past century beginning with Montessori, much of the understanding of children's spirituality and consequent religious education has been governed by a predominately Cartesian, developmentalist approach. A resolutely modernist agenda in Christian education has privileged adult knowledge and dismissed or ignored children's spiritual experiences.

In the last two decades of the twentieth century, pioneering work in children's spirituality recognised the intrinsic worth and legitimacy of children's experiences. With an acknowledgement that the affective domain was equally as important as the cognitive domain in human development, greater credence was given to the spiritual domain which is linked with the affective mode. I have highlighted some of the most widely-recognised studies that have influenced religious educators and informed my personal understanding of children's spirituality. I have also briefly discussed a more generous understanding of 'religious knowing.' It is with a wholistic view of the child's spiritual life and experience that I now turn to the presentation of and reflection on children's experiences of the house of the church.

CHAPTER V: REFLECTIONS ON CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES IN THE HOUSE OF THE CHURCH[4]

> *My earliest memories of church would be in Smalltown, NB [in the late 1940s]…. I'd be three years old…. I remember going to the service. Children were allowed into the main 11 o'clock service. We were seated of course, not with other children, but with our parents which meant we couldn't see anything. But also I loved to swing my legs on the pew, and the pew had a board from the front of the pew down to the floor. So the first thing my mother would do would be to take my shoes off, so I wouldn't bang on the board because my legs were short and would not reach the floor. So that is one thing I remember distinctly. The pews were shiny and I could slide on them. They were somewhat formed to fit the body a little bit, but I loved to swing my legs, but hitting the heels on the back of this board was, of course, a problem…. My image of the church was of dark, dark wood. That's what I remember, but it may now not seem so dark, but as a child, dark wood pews, dark wood walls with wainscoting and then plaster on the upper half.* (Roderick)[5]

What is happening in the lifeworld of this child, sitting on a dark wooden bench staring at a wall of dark wood in front of him, and enjoying the simple satisfaction of a resounding 'thunk' as his swinging heels hit the board under the bench? Perhaps he is thinking, "Church seems important to Mom and Dad; we all put on 'Sunday' clothes, which we only wear on this day; I'm not allowed to talk out loud – Mom says "Shhh" if I do, and she takes my shoes off so I can't make so much noise, but at least she doesn't make me stop swinging my feet – there's not much else to do; I can't see what all the big people are looking at in the front of the church, and even when we stand up to sing and Mom lets me stand on the bench, I can't see over the heads of the people who are sitting in front of us."

These experiences are being added to the storehouse of impressions from which even a three-year-old is beginning to make meaning of his lifeworld. How will they

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[4] For ease of identification by the reader, excerpts from the interviews with participants are placed in italics.
[5] To protect the anonymity of the interview participants, all names used are pseudonyms.

intersect with the formal teaching he will receive in the church about the nature of God and the Church? How will these experiences shape his understanding of himself as a spiritual being and of relationship with others?

One trait that distinguishes being human is to make meaning of the world and one's experiences within it. Martinus Langeveld (1984) suggests that there are at least four modes of 'sense-making' or 'meaning-giving' through which human beings give coherence to the world (pp. 216-217). "Open sense-making" is "the collection of interpretations that we build through our communion and contact with our fellow human beings" and which is situated in the "held-in-common world of daily life." A "non-obligatory sense-making" is based in play; while it too is connected to the world, through this mode the child discovers that things need not have fixed meanings but may become something else – for instance a pencil may be a soldier. The "creative sense-making" of an artist constitutes its own coherent world, Langeveld notes and he does not explore it. Finally, Langeveld suggests that "personal sense-making" consists of the ways and means by which one constitutes oneself as a person. I appreciate Langeveld's approach, especially his view that the child is "not directly bound to a particular way of development" even though the limitations of being a child do circumscribe the possibilities of meaning-making (p. 216).

In reflecting on the lived experiences of children in a church setting, I have been guided by the fundamental lifeworld existentials as presented by van Manen (1997). These are lived human relation (relationality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality) and lived space (spatiality). In identifying these four existential themes, van Manen suggests that they are probably common to most human beings, regardless of

historical, cultural or social situatedness (p. 101). Lifeworld existentials are a feature of much phenomenological literature; most notably, Merleau-Ponty (1962) explored these and other existentials as constituting the structure of the human lifeworld. These modes of sensory perception provide a useful framework as we explore the ways children seek to make meaning of their interaction with the lifeworld of the religious setting. Langeveld's reflections on modes of sense-making further informed and expanded the approaches of identifying meaning-making through the matrix of the life-world existentials. Von Bonsdorff (2005) articulated the importance of human experience as a basis for interhuman understanding:

> Human experience is, for each individual, personal – it is *my* experience – yet personal experience as we (who understand language) know it is inherently intersubjective. Its material, elements and very structure stem from the shared world of language and social practice. Although our experiences differ, these differences are not a hindrance to interhuman understanding, but are instead among the factors that make the experience of others interesting and understandable to us. (p. 117)

Organisation of Data

As I considered how to organise and present the data gleaned from the interviews, in this chapter, I debated as to whether to present the experiences of individual personalities or to present data under the auspices of the lifeworld designations. Because I wished to emphasize those qualities that are associated with our physical senses as an aspect of the commonplace of milieu, even as I wished not to lose sight of the individuality of the children and remembered childhood, I decided to present the data as representative of the four lifeworlds. This choice resulted in repetition of certain portions of the interviews which spoke to more than one sense. Although I might have eliminated any repetition, I believe that dissertations – essentially research reports – benefit more

from erring on the redundant rather than the ambiguous. I chose to repeat sections of interviews if I believed such repetition would convey a richer picture than if I just quoted snippets or avoided the repetition altogether.

I am also cognizant of the fact that some interviews were richer than others, owing generally to the verbal abilities of the children. In the case of the adults, a few of the interviewees talked more about their religious training than their actual lived experiences. Due to the variance in the interviews, some have been drawn on more heavily than others. Three-quarters of the children's interviews are quoted and two-thirds of the adult interviews have been used.

Choosing to represent my data using physical senses as an organising mechanism also seemed to force another choice not to present the data from the perspective of the individuals. I considered this choice, but chose the perspectives that I used for two reasons. First, as noted, I wanted to emphasise the multisensory experiences. Second, in this case I felt it would be confusing or redundant if I presented data from both perspectives. Another researcher might have chosen a different way to represent data. My intention is that, taken as a whole, the data will represent the multisensory lifeworlds of this sample of a particular faith tradition in Atlantic Canada.

Lived Human Relation – Relationality: Hospitality and Habituation

Alfred Schutz stated, "all the other manifold social relationships are derived from the originary experiencing of the totality of the other's self in the community of time and space. Any theoretical analysis of the notion of environment … would have to start from the face-to-face relations as a basic structure of the world of daily life" (quoted in Seamon, 1984, p. 133). In the lifeworlds of the children grounding this research, the

importance of personal relationships emerges as a dominant theme. For many of them, their relationships to friends and family appeared to constitute their primary relationships to the place itself:

> C. A.: *What do you like most about going to church?*
>
> Hermione: *Probably because you see your friends and when it's Easter time, you go around and find eggs, and I like when you play, and worship time where my Mom teaches.* (Hermione, age 6)
>
> Dugald: *I like singing and the worship band. I sing in the worship band. I liked the Wednesday night suppers. I met my friends there.* (Dugald, age 11)

Jenna is a rather shy girl with a sweet smile always on her face:

> C. A.: *Can you tell me a little bit about this church – how you feel about this space?*
>
> Jenna: *There are a lot of people who recognise you when you come in and everyone recognises you.*
>
> C. A.: *Is that a good thing for you?* Jenna nods in the affirmative. *Do you usually sit in the same place?*
>
> Jenna: *Yes, on the left side facing the front. It depends on who I go with – my family or my cousins.* (Jenna, age 10)

Her friend Jill is a bright and bubbly girl, who speaks to me in a self-confident way that appears mature for her age:

> C. A.: *The church you go to – what do you like about it?*
>
> Jill: *I like it a lot; it's small and we know everyone. I like the pot-luck suppers. Youth group is really fun, and the worship and the Sunday School.... I like it when my friends are here.... I like this church. The church is part of the community. I can see the top of the church from where I live.* (Jill, age 11)

Caitlyn doesn't attend church as regularly as some of the other children because her Mom works many weekends as a nurse at a seniors' nursing home, and she enjoys having her two daughters with her at the home on Sundays. However, Caitlyn and her sister Kerri

sometimes come with their grandparents when their parents are unable to attend. She, too, is remarkably self-confident and poised for a nine-year-old as she dialogues with me:

> Caitlyn says, *We always sit over there on that side, in the fourth row with my Mommy and Daddy and Kerri and Grampy and Grammy.* (Caitlyn, age 9)

Hermione, Jenna and Jill all attend a relatively small community church with an average attendance of about 110. The children attend the same elementary school in the village. A child will frequently join the family of a friend, or two or more friends will sit together by themselves (never out of eyesight of parents in this place, however). Two four-year-old girls, Ella and Gaby, look for each other as soon as they enter the sanctuary; since their respective families sit on opposite sides of the church, a short trip will immediately ensue. Outgoing Ella often takes the initiative; perhaps she will assertively lead Gaby back to her family pew, or she may settle in with Gaby's family, while her mother and six-year-old brother, Stuart, remain firmly in 'their' place. Ella and Gaby sit closely together, giggling and whispering, and largely uninterrupted unless they become disruptive.

The concept of 'belongingness' as a basic human need has been explored most thoroughly by Baumeister and Leary (1995). From their extensive literature review, they determined that enough empirical evidence existed to conclude that the need to belong is a basic and intrinsic human need. They proposed two main features of this need, namely, the need for frequent personal contacts or interactions with the other person and an interpersonal relationship marked by stability, affective concern and continuity. Ideally, this concern would be mutual, although the perception that one was the recipient of the other's lasting concern was probably the more salient factor (p. 500). Building on the work of Baumeister and Leary, Osterman (2000), as well as many other researchers and

educators, has demonstrated the critical role that belongingness or relatedness (marked by trust in others) has in the overall health, welfare and education of young people.

The language of belonging is commonly invoked in the Christian faith community – as in the popular phrases 'belonging to the family of God,' 'belonging to this church family,' 'being a member of this church.' Within the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the sacred texts also mandate an inclusive attitude towards children. Christian scripture is clear in this regard: Jesus welcomed and blessed children when his friends thought them an interruption (Mark 10:13 – 16); he took a child in his arms and identified a welcome of the child with welcome to himself (Mark 9: 36 – 37); he recognized the God-directed praise of infants and children (Matthew 21: 16).

Throughout its history, the Christian church has tried (with various degrees of success) to follow Christ's example toward children by establishing hospitals, orphanages and schools to care for children in need. However, in many respects, the church often has betrayed its littlest ones. Indeed, I would argue that in terms of meaningful inclusion – the mutuality of concern that Baumeister and Leary identify – of children in the worshipping community, the church (read – adults) has generally failed to honour its own teachings. This failing has been vigorously addressed by concerned Christian educators such as Marva Dawn (1997) and Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse & Linda Cannell (2005) as well as many other theologians and educators in recent years. The result of this concern is that the place of children in the faith community is receiving renewed attention throughout the church.

Despite the failings of the adults, how do children find their place in the house of the church? The apparently well-adjusted children already encountered, Hermione,

Dugald, Jenna and Jill, reply with ease and confidence, "This place is where I am a member of a group called 'friends.' I belong here with them." They take the initiative to sit with friends they recognise, knowing they will be accepted without question. Caitlyn, who doesn't come frequently enough to be part of a group even though she knows the other children from school, nevertheless knows she belongs there too – in the fourth row on the right side.

Four-year-old Susie states emphatically as she shows me the picture she has drawn, *That's my church*. It's a phrase she uses four times in our interview – with emphasis! Susie and her Mom have been attending a downtown city church since Susie's birth, and have been warmly drawn into the fellowship of the church. There is no family history with this particular church; Susie doesn't overtly mention friends at church (although her grandmother tells me that she gets along well with the other children). However, Susie is confident that this is a place where she belongs. Susie had experienced uncertainty and unsettledness in her home life during her short life – the absence of her birth father from a young age, an unsteady relationship between her mother and stepfather, and a number of housing moves which have necessitated corresponding changes in childcare. The constants in her life have been her mother and her maternal grandmother (who lives about 100 kilometres away) and *her* church. Her relationships with others in this church are not clearly defined, but seem to be comfortable.

C. A.: *Stuart, can you tell me if you have any favourite spaces in the church?*

Stuart: *The second pew.*

C.A.: *Now that's interesting. Can you tell me why it is?*

Stuart: *Because we always sit there.* (Stuart, age 6)

This comment takes me quite by surprise. Stuart is a very active little boy. He finds it almost impossible to sit still, and speaks in a staccato, breathless hurry. 'Sitting' anywhere wouldn't appear to be in his vocabulary. He and his family have been attending the village church for approximately three years, upon the invitation of his mother's colleague. The family settled in quickly, with a few friendships already in place. Stuart and his little sister, Ella, bonded with Pastor Paul, and made friends with other children. Then, the family structure changed dramatically a year ago, when the parents separated. Mom and the children moved into the village to be closer to support networks; their friendship with the pastor and his spouse deepened. The family has occupied the same pew since they began attending three years ago; Dad would often come with the children while Mom worked. For Stuart, one of his favourite places is the second pew. While his sister moves freely across the church to sit with her best friend, Stuart sits in precisely the same place each Sunday with Mom, in the second pew from the front (with no one in front of them) where he has an unobstructed view of the platform and pulpit.

Much later in our conversation (which has swirled around both Stuart and Ella, interspersed with lots of talk centred on their drawings), he abruptly volunteers:

C. A.: *Okay, let's go on to another question.*

Stuart: *Sitting in the seat.*

C. A.: *You like sitting in the seat?*

Stuart: *Because I like watching Paul on the stage.*

How does Stuart experience relationships in this church? How does he 'belong' here? In the midst of uncertainty in the relationship with Dad who doesn't "live with us anymore," is this seat, this pew, a secure place to belong? Is it comforting to *watch Paul*

who is always there *on the stage*, where he belongs? Stuart's relationship with Pastor Paul seems to fulfil all of Baumeister and Leary's (1995) criteria for belongingness: the need for frequent personal contacts or interactions with the other person, and an interpersonal relationship marked by stability, affective concern and continuity. Stuart sees Pastor Paul every Sunday and sometimes during the week as well; the pastor shows genuine interest in and concern for him (demonstrated also by attending birthday parties and special events in the family). The pastor has been a part of this place since Stuart first arrived. Stuart also likes *running around in the gym*, *being on the stage*, *the stories* and *playing*. Both he and his sister run to greet Paul with effusive joy when they arrive at church. Stuart's demeanour and behaviour indicate to me that he feels 'at home,' as do many of the other children, in this place. But, I wonder, does six-year-old Stuart experience a deeper sense of 'belonging' to this place?

Germaine's story is quite different. Today a competent professional woman with a loving family of her own, she grew up in a highly dysfunctional home with a mother who suffered from severe chronic depression. As a child, she was left to her own devices and spent considerable time on the streets to escape the turmoil at home:

> *I was a kid, walking down the street, here was this big church, big doors, the bells were ringing and I just walked in. It really is amazing. It was actually the bells that attracted me. The chimes were played before the service began and the doors would have been opened. I walked in, walked right down the aisle and sat in the very front pew. I did that for months. I'd go down on Sunday evenings.*

At first, Germaine was largely ignored by the congregation. She remembers one particularly traumatic day when she was eleven years old:

> *And yet you know, I do remember my mother had tried to commit suicide and it was on a Sunday, and I was the one who called the ambulance and it came and then I went to the church and sat in the front pew and I cried. Unfortunately no one came to me. I had a poncho on. It was just very strange.*

One wonders what kept Germaine coming back to this church, when the initial human response seemed so inhospitable. What was it about the call of bells and the invitation of open doors that spoke so loudly to this distressed child?

An Excursus on Church Bells

Church bells have figured significantly in the interviews. A number of the interviewed children and adults mentioned the sound of the church bell and several children included them in the drawings of their churches.

In many parts of our country, church bells have become a quaint anachronism. Older people speak nostalgically of their sound, but in the cacophony of contemporary urban/suburban life, their ring is often absent or drowned out by other sounds. For some, their pealing tones only contribute to a decibel level that is threatening their health; noise pollution has become a serious issue and the inescapable sound of a church bell has led to law suits (for instance, see CBC, 2003a). And yet, the appeal of bells appears to be deeply imbedded in the human experience as attested by their consistent civic and religious use over centuries of time. In his lovely monograph on the history and manufacture of bells, Wendell Westcott traces their long and sophisticated development in both Asia and Europe, revealing the central role they played in public life (Westcott, 1998).

The ringing of bells is part of most of the world's prominent religions, the major exceptions being Judaism (which uses the shofar and trumpet for similar purposes) and Islam (Westcott, 1998, Ch.1).

> The bell held a certain aura of mysticism, as if it contained hidden spirits that communicated with the living by means of an enigmatic language, one intermittently plaintive, ominous, stern, or reassuring. From earliest times, the indefinite fading of a ringing tone has been associated with the infinite. (Ch.1)

The association of bells with religious observance is especially strong both in Eastern religions and in Christianity. Writing of the mystical association of the bell in the Buddhist tradition, Burnett claims that,

> the first sound that a bell makes when struck signifies the awakened state which sees clearly into the nature of reality, and the fading tone is considered to be an icon of that reality, insofar as it symbolizes both awakening and impermanence. Thus the clear, brilliant sound of the bell symbolizes the emptiness, and therefore the openness of reality. (Burnett, n. d.)

Within Christianity, bells have played an equally important role, although over a shorter span of time. Their public use began only after the legitimization of the Christianity by Constantine in the fourth century.

> Among the most basic and widespread uses of bells is signalling— calling to worship, marking significant points of ritual, tolling the hours, announcing events, rejoicing, warning, mourning, and sounding alarms. But in the Christian tradition, a bell is so much more than simply a signal— it is considered to be part of the Church's prayer itself, one of the architectonic and public dimensions of liturgy. (Burnett, n. d.)

The liturgical component is especially evident in the Russian Orthodox Church, which considers church bells to be "singing icons." In the Western church, bell-ringing developed into a musical art-form with specific geographical styles, with the English differing from the mainland European method. The Dutch became leaders in the casting of the finest bells and in the manufacture of carillons.

In her mystery novel set in the Fen country of East Anglia in the 1930s, and based on the distinctive English tradition of "change-ringing," Dorothy Sayers (1934) describes the custom of attributing personality and power to the church bells, some of which dated to the fourteenth century and were distinguished by personal names. As the bell-ringer begins the change, Sayers writes,

> He grasped the rope and pulled it gently downwards, gathering the slack in his left hand. Softly, tremulously, high overhead in the tower, Sabaoth began to speak, and her sisters after her as the ringers stood to their ropes. (p. 20)

The villagers exhibit both reverence for and fear of the bells. In fact, a petty criminal expresses no love for bells, exclaiming,

> 'And those bells! I was expecting all the time to hear them speak. I never liked the sound of bells. There's something – you'd think they were alive, sometimes, and could talk. When I was a boy, I read a story in an old magazine about a bell that called out after a murderer. You'll think I'm soft, talking that way, but it made an impression on me and I can't forget it.' (p. 252)

In poetry and prose, authors such as Schiller, Longfellow, Poe, Tennyson, Thoreau, Hugo, and Galsworthy have paid homage to the glory of the bell. Schiller's moralistic poem, "The Song of the Bell" in which the casting of a bell becomes a sustained metaphor for a man's life from birth to the grave, became a staple of German schoolrooms. As a young adult, my father recited the entire poem (interspersed with musical selections) at a wedding reception for friends.

In Nova Scotia, the earliest meeting-house-style churches had no belfries as befitted their simple, ascetic Puritan ancestors. As churches evolved into a more classical style, the inclusion of a bell depended a great deal on the financial resources of the congregation, or on local circumstances as in the case of the Little Dutch Church in Halifax. Built around 1756 by German-speaking Lutheran settlers (the name "Dutch" being the English misnomer for "Deutsch"), the church received a bell from the fortress of Louisburg after it fell to Wolfe in 1760. Holy Trinity Anglican Church in the Annapolis Valley received a donated bell in 1792, although it was not installed until 1797 when money was finally raised for the addition of a steeple. Bells were often the gift of generous donors. As steeples were added, so too were belfries with their precious bells.

Ava, who attended church in rural south-western Nova Scotia as a child, recalled the devastating fire which demolished the church when she was about ten or eleven, and its subsequent rebuilding through the volunteer efforts of its members:

> *We rebuilt and in a short time we had a fine new church building erected. My uncle was chief carpenter, with the help of the local men. All the men in the village who had woodlots donated timber for use in building the church. Great logging parties were held, the logs trucked to local mills to be prepared for timber to be used in rebuilding. My Dad and his brothers sought out and donated a new bell for the new steeple in memory of their father, my grandfather. Church bells, particularly the ringing of that bell, have always caught my attention.* (Ava, adult)

Local histories reveal the ubiquitous presence of church bells throughout the Maritime provinces by the beginning of the twentieth century, and in many communities they were pressed into service for fire alarms, natural calamities and major civic celebrations.

A recent children's book reveals the omnipresence of church bells in the folk consciousness of Atlantic Canada. In her delightful Christmas tale, *One Christmas in Lunenburg*, Amy Bennet (2004) writes,

> Rachel woke with a start. At first she thought it must be early morning - Christmas Day! But then she heard the sound of church bells and saw the stars in the dark sky through her window. All along the South Shore church bells were chiming for their midnight service. It was midnight on Christmas eve. (n. p.)

One of the adult interviewees in my research recalled his experience of hearing the church bells as a boy of about seven:

> *Then there was the bell. I remember hearing the bell ring for the services, up in the tower.... I remember walking along – we used to park down ____ Street and walk back up to the church and hear the bell ringing in the tower. And when I came here, that's one thing I insisted on – ringing the bell from the tower.... It is, because here* [on the university campus], *every week, I hear one or two students comment, "I heard the bell, so this evening, I came in." So there's something special about the bell. As a child, it proved to be very impressionable. I remember going up to see it.* (Roderick)

As a young girl, Germaine experienced the peal of the church bells in a Maritime city as an invitation to enter the open doors of the church. While it would be the relationships (described below) developed in this place that saved her from the street, it was the building that called out to her initially. Something in the resonant tones of the bells signalled "welcome" to her. As Sayers' rector exclaimed as he meticulously reviewed the instructions for a peal that had gone awry, "She [the bell] can't come home till she's called" (Sayers, 1934, p. 162).

Called by the bells, Germaine eventually found her home despite the indifferent reception she received at first. She shared with me the following:

> *At the large Baptist church in Sunday School we had a girls' class and a boys' class. It was deemed I was too bad for the girls' class so they put me in with the boys, where actually I had a great time. I know parents would tell their kids not to hang out with me because I was a bad influence. It was a fairly affluent church, you know. I was pretty atypical of kids who were in that church. I was rejected by most of the girls. My positive experience would have been around sports – a volleyball team, a basketball team. They had a church league and we had tournaments and travelled to other places to play games. That and the youth group – I think of one particular youth minister that I particularly connected well with. He helped me survive. In terms of the building – it was a typical church in that it was open in the daytime, a place of refuge for me. After school I'd go there and hang out a lot in the youth minister's office and just sit there and talk. I can just imagine it drove him crazy. But it really was what helped me survive. I went downstairs a lot and taught myself how to play the piano. At one point there was a children's choir and the man who did the choir actually taught some music notes. I do remember that – having a binder, and activities to do with the notes and whatnot. I worked very faithful on that and figured out how to play. At one point I remember being involved in everything I could be involved in, which would have been about five days out of seven. We had Pioneers, Youth Group, Choir. I went to Prayer Meetings – to everything. It was what helped me survive.*
>
> *There was one family who sort of took me in. I do remember them. It was strange, different. I had the tendency to attach myself to one person and there was one person I attempted to follow. Basically I followed her all the time. She kind of tolerated me, I guess.*

This place provided the relationships that helped Germaine survive. Although we may credit the youth pastor and a compassionate woman with providing the significant relationships that an at-risk child desperately needed, we should also recognise the indomitable spirit that drove her to seek and to remain in a place that provided refuge and, eventually, wholeness.

For Germaine and Stuart, a yearning for belonging appeared to comprise a strong element of their lifeworld of relationality. Other children used words such as "safe" or variations of it:

> C. A.: *Let's start with this space* [the sanctuary].*Can you tell me how you feel about any part?*
>
> Caitlyn: *The benches. I feel safe and relaxed.* (Caitlyn, age 9)
>
> Jason: *Okay, when I go there I feel all happy and excited. I get to go there only on Sunday.*
>
> C. A.: *Can you describe for me why you feel happy when you go there?*
>
> Jason: *There's all kinds of love. No one can hurt me. It's really safe.* (Jason, age 9)
>
> C. A.: *Can you tell me how you feel about that church?*
>
> Susie: *Happy.*
>
> C. A.: *Oh, really. Why?*
>
> Susie: *Because God's protecting us.*
>
> C. A. (later): *Do you think there should be special places in the church for children?*
>
> Susie: *Yes.*
>
> C. A.: *You do? What kind of special places?*
>
> Susie: *Like downstairs there's a space.*

C. A.: *Is that just for children?*

Susie: *And big people to watch you.* (Susie, age 5)

For other children relationality was expressed in terms of "having fun" with friends. Eight-year-old Lisa described her church to me:

Lisa: *Well, downstairs there are places where children go. There's a place to hang up your coats and a big space where we run around and play tag.*

C.A.: *If you were going to build a church yourself and you could build it any way you wanted, what would it look like?*

Lisa: *I would build a church that was fun for kids and good for adults too, with a sanctuary for the adults and one for the kids.* (Lisa, age 8)

Nine-year-old Jason, who is the son of a clergyperson and attends two churches, described his preference:

C.A.: *Why is it your favourite church?*

Jason: *Because it's a little bigger. It has a gym, so you can run around and all that stuff.*

C. A.: *Do you think there should be special spaces in churches just for kids?*

Jason: *Yeah, there should be some place where they can actually play, and a quiet spot and a place with toys where they can play.* (Jason, age 9)

Another nine-year-old boy obviously felt the same:

C. A.: *I'm interested in how you feel about the building.*

Alleyn: *I like it. It's big.*

C. A.: *It is, isn't it. What parts are interesting to you?*

Alleyn: *I like the gym. I like sometimes practicing basketball in there when we're waiting to start. So that's fun. I like Reverend Paul. He's really nice. So...yeah.*

C. A.: *Excellent. How do you feel while you're there?*

Alleyn: *Well, I feel like cosy and happy. I'm also surrounded by God.* (Alleyn, age 9)

Apparently for Alleyn, gym, basketball, Reverend Paul and God all contributed to that cosy, happy feeling that signified comfort and belonging.

Felisha, a teenager who does not attend church regularly now, still remembers her early experiences fondly:

> *I was always comfortable in church because everyone was so nice like. Like as a kid I remember thinking, "Are they always this nice, or are they just this nice at church?" There were a lot of old people.*

Eleven-year-old Gavin and his sister, nine-year-old Cassie, are heavily involved in their church, attending worship, Sunday School and a mid-week children's club (AWANA) regularly each week. They spoke enthusiastically about church, often echoing each other's statements:

> Cassie: *My favourite thing at church would have to be AWANA. There's different schedules for different groups* [she lists them all].
>
> C. A.: *What spaces do you like best in the church?*
>
> Gavin: *The ARC – it's like a real gym. It's pretty spacious. You can get lots of exercise. There's a big stage – for concerts and plays. There's a kitchen for pot-lucks, basketball nets, a piano. We play games there.*
>
> Cassie: *There are team lines – red, yellow, green and blue.*
>
> Gavin: *I'm on the red team and she's on the yellow. Each year we switch teams.*
>
> C. A.: *What about your Sunday School rooms?*
>
> Cassie: *Downstairs there's a big room with a piano and TV for movies. Then there are three classrooms – the first for younger children and preschoolers, two to three. There are two teachers in each classroom. We are in the same class for grades five and six. The teens come down and do a skit for us – a Bible story.*
>
> C. A.: *What are your favourite spaces?*
>
> Cassie: *The sanctuary – it's nice to be around all the people, and to hear the piano playing.*

Gavin: *I like that room where we have the skits, because they have some pretty cool chairs in there.*

C. A.: *How do you feel when you're in those spaces?*

Gavin: *I think when you're in any space you should feel comfortable. I'd like a space where I feel happy and would want to be in that space. I like a fun room and want to stay there.*

Cassie: *I like my space because I feel warm and welcome there.*

C. A.: *Do you think there should be special spaces in the church just for children?*

Gavin: *Yes, sometimes you just need to get away. If the pastor is speaking, some kids need to go where they can play.*

Gavin (later): *When there's a break between church and Sunday School, my friend – a teenager – and I start playing basketball. You do something you like doing.*

These two young siblings are highly verbal and articulate. While they spoke appreciatively of the worship experience and what it meant spiritually to them, it seemed apparent that friendships, fun activities and relationships with people of various ages (peers, teens and adults) were also significant parts of their experiences of church. 'Comfortable,' 'warm,' and 'happy' were words that slipped spontaneously from their lips. Sitting side-by-side at the dining-room table of their home, they exuded an engaging satisfaction with their faith community – a place where they unquestioningly belonged.

The positive relational experiences indicated by the young children whom I interviewed are contrasted by several painful experiences recounted by older individuals. For instance, Todd, a sixteen-year-old teenager, remembered:

C. A.: *Any particular experiences that stand out in your memory?*

Todd: *My very first memory of church – I was sitting there with a friend of mine. I was about four years old. I had the worst cold and was coughing. This old*

lady sitting ahead of me got up, gave me the dirtiest look ever and walked out.

C. A.: *That's a very powerful memory for a four-year-old.*

Todd: *I felt kind of bad.*

Norma, a woman now in her sixties, who grew up in the Church of Ireland in Northern Ireland, related a similar experience:

> *My sister is 17 months older than I and we were in church. I had a bad coughing fit. My mother was one of these people who did a lot in the church. The minister stopped the service and said, "Would you mind taking Norma out?" which she did do. It was very embarrassing. That was the kind of man he was. I didn't find him very warm.*

While Norma remains committed to her Christian faith, she also witnessed the bitter relations between Protestants and Roman Catholics in her childhood home country, and she expressed reservations about the institutional church.

These two similar early experiences were quite different in tone from the memory of a man in his sixties who grew up in rural Nova Scotia, and drew on his memories from about six or seven years of age:

> *There was none of this, the mother staying home because she had to do this or that with the baby. Mom and the baby and all the kids were at church. But you wouldn't know, because like I say, those were the days when children were told to be seen and not heard. That's the way it was. Rev. Black would raise the volume of his voice, nobody would ever take a baby out. He'd just crank up the volume so everybody could still hear him. He never, ever, made any comments about children making a noise that I can remember. He would never embarrass anyone, he'd just crank up the volume a bit and that was fine. You didn't often hear a baby cry in church because a lot of times, even though he was speaking, the little ones would be asleep.* (Martin)

Although there was the recognition that children were meant "to be seen and not heard," there was also an assumption that children were an integral part of this faith community, including babies – either crying or asleep. In spite of boredom and physical discomfort in a

small, rural church with few amenities, Martin conveyed through a richly-detailed interview, the conviction that he and the other children were as much a part of their church family as of their personal family. Although Martin grew up in a small university town, he and his family attended the little church about 15-20 km away in a community in which his mother had grown up. He recalled:

> Martin: *When church was over if we could get over to the school yard which was just across the street. We'd have a game of tag, or if someone had a stick and a ball, we'd have a ball game going. Adults always congregated in the church yard and socialized unless it was a miserable day, and then it wasn't so much fun to do that. That's basically how it went. One of the things we looked forward to was that we were going to get to see the other kids we hadn't seen for a week.*
>
> C. A.: *A rich, rich life.*
>
> Martin: *Oh yes, no question.*
>
> C. A.: *Some important relationships.*
>
> Martin: *I still see some of those people today, and we get to catch up on families. Over the years, visiting has kind of gone by the wayside.*

As far as I am aware, none of the children quoted above have ever experienced any physical danger or threat in their church experiences. These are the fortunate children – treasured by both parents and leaders in their churches. While they may speak casually about safety, it is apparently part of their consciousness. Even five-year-old Susie commented on God's protection and *big people to watch you*, as she light-heartedly bounced around and played with the art supplies on the table during our interview. Tragically, as has been too-frequently highlighted in the news and explored in the literature, abuse (emotional, physical and sexual) can and does occur within the environs of the church (Capps, 1995; Cozzens, 2002; Nason-Clark, 2000; Penner, 2005).

Discussing the importance of belonging and how abuse shatters the capacity for belonging, Jean Vanier observes the harsh reality for some children, "As a child discovers at certain moments her parents' lack of love, their need to control or possess, and sometimes their violence and abuse, she discovers through her inner feelings of depression, anger, and revolt that belonging is a difficult, even dangerous reality" (quoted in Penner, 2005, p. 73). No child should suffer such betrayal in any place, let alone the church which is mandated by love to welcome and nurture all children.

Childhood holds many fears, and while the children I interviewed appeared relaxed and secure, their choice of words, no matter how casually uttered, gives pause. I would suggest that being comfortable and cosy, having fun, and feeling safe and protected are children's expressions of belonging – that they "pertain to" their place of worship as the origins of the word 'belong' suggest (belong, Online Etymology Dictionary). Following Baumeister's and Leary's thesis, belonging is constitutive of relationship – healthy and mutually rewarding relationship. Although the children interviewed did not use the word 'belong' to describe their experience of church, the words they used reflected a sense of habituation.

Some adults who were interviewed about their early memories in church recalled the importance to them of a special place in the church that signified 'their place.' Karen, who grew up in a village church, remembered sitting with other children in the front pew of the little church:

> *That was our place and we sat together throughout the service. We would read our "Sunday Pix" as well as listen to the minister and participate in the service as soon as we could read.... I joined the choir when I was about eleven and then I could sit at the front and look down at the congregation.*

Likewise, Clarke, a retired pastor, recalled his feelings about church at the age of five:

> *The only thing I can remember is that I liked my Sunday School teacher, an adult man, and I knew that the teacher liked me, and was kind. His class of five-year-old boys met at the front of the sanctuary, and sat in the two front pews. I also remember the rope that hung down in the entry way, which was to ring the bell. I remember thinking, "Someday I'm going to ring that bell." But sadly, I never did because we moved to _____ when I was six.* (Clarke, adult) [bells again!]

Although belonging is based primarily on human relationships, it does not follow that the physical environment is entirely extraneous. The evidence above suggests that a physical place of one's own is also important – to some children at least. Another example of this longing comes from a church news report of the dedication of a new church building:

> After two decades of meeting in school gyms, foyers, rented space and shared space, what does it mean to TMC [Trinity Mennonite Church] to finally have its own building? Said seven-year-old Aaron Thiessen, "What I really appreciate about our building is my new Sunday school room." (Daley, 2006, p. 25)

I suggest that human relationships and the physical environment are inter-related. Buildings are designed to be inhabited, and have the ability to influence the relationships that develop within them. In *The Most Beautiful House in the World*, the Canadian architect, Witold Rybczyski (1989), writes evocatively about 'inhabiting' a place:

> 'Inhabiting' does not only mean living within. It means occupying – infusing a particular site with our presence, and not only with our activities and physical possessions but also with our aspirations and dreams. We live in a house, and in the process we make it alive. (p. 171)

Rybczyski quotes Samuel Clemens' (Mark Twain) feelings about his Hartford home:

> "Our house was not unsentient matter – it had a heart and a soul, and eyes to see with; and approvals and solicitudes and deep sympathies; it was of us, and we were in its confidence and lived in its grace and in the peace of its benedictions. We never came home from an absence that its face did not light up and speak out in eloquent welcome – and we could not enter it unmoved." (p. 171)

'Home' is a word that conjures a sense of comfort, familiarity and belonging. It generally refers to one's personal dwelling, although the term is also used in other applications, such as 'being at home in one's environment,' or 'being at home in one's own skin.' Certainly, one may have negative associations with home, but such associations are all the more bitter for being antipodal to the notion of home. While a house of worship is only inhabited by its members for a relatively short period of time in an average week, it has the potential to be a spiritual home. Giles (2004) contends, "Like the house-churches of the early centuries, our buildings should provide us houses which can become homes for the Christian assembly, showing us how to be fully human in order that we may become more fully church" (p. 146). To emphasise, he restates, "We need today, not buildings that make grandiose or pretentious statements, but buildings that make us feel at home" (p. 146). Rybczyski (1989) writes of "the moving loveliness of human occupation, of a place transformed" (p. 189), and I would add of a church home, 'a place transforming.' Indeed, Bachelard (1964) claims that "all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home" (p. 5).

An environment that is small and intimate enough to feel comfortable and safe and that is hospitable invites the formation of relationships. Four-year-old Ella can find her way across the sanctuary to her friend's side while still under the watchful, but relaxed, eye of her mother. Six-year-old Stuart enjoys his place *in the second pew* from where he can watch his friend, Pastor Paul. Shy, ten-year-old Jenna is reassured that when she comes in a lot of people will recognise her. Nine-year-old Jason and eight-year-old Lisa run around and play without immediate adult supervision, while nine-year-old Alleyn and eleven-year-old Gavin shoot a few hoops with friends in the gym before or after the worship service.

The children mentioned above all attend relatively small churches, with average Sunday attendance from 55 to 110. While I am not suggesting that being a small church guarantees a warm and hospitable environment, this is how these children have experienced their churches. We may compare these children's experiences with that of Germaine, whose middle childhood and youth were spent in a relatively large urban church (average attendance - 350). Attracted by the bells and drawn in by the open doors, she initially encountered a cool reception. Her own perseverance in attending (*I just thought this was a place I needed to be.*) until she encountered caring adults kept the door open for caring relationships. I wonder if in this large formal space the congregation found it easier to ignore a little girl who didn't seem to fit in, in contrast to a smaller more intimate space in which it might be more difficult to ignore a newcomer?

Lived Body – Corporeality

Phenomenologically, human beings are always bodily in the world (van Manen, 1997, p. 103). That is, the chief manner in which people encounter the world and one another is through the physical senses of touch, sight, taste, smell and hearing. Merleau-Ponty (1962) described corporeality as our way of belonging to the world and facing our tasks. "Sense experience is that vital communication with the world which makes it present as a familiar setting of our life" (p. 52).

In a more poetic vein, Diane Ackerman (1990) in her wide-ranging and meticulously-researched exploration of the five senses, *A Natural History of the Senses*, stated, "It is both our panic and our privilege to be mortal and sense-full. We live on the leash of our senses. Although they enlarge us, they also limit and restrain us, but how beautifully" (p. xviii).

Architects, especially, value the physical senses through which we experience the built environment. Juhani Pallasmaa described the experience of place or architecture as multi-sensory – containing the five senses of vision (fire, light), hearing (air), smell (vapour), taste (water) and touch (earth) (Johannsen, 2005, p. 192). Stephen Holl has also emphasised the question of perception in his writings about phenomenology of architecture. Holl, whose architectural *tour de force*, the Bloch Building – the addition to the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri – opened to critical acclaim, wrote about inner and outer perception:

> The experience of architecture awakes all senses and includes different aspects such as time, shadow and transparency, colour, texture, material or detail. He took up the empirical distinguishing of inner and outer perception, which has already been discussed by Brentano, an important figure in the beginning of phenomenology of philosophy. Holl demanded that both the outer perception of physical phenomena and the inner perception of mental phenomena should be stimulated by architecture. (quoted in Johannsen, 2005, p. 192)

Based on an actual incident, Ng (1981) painted a verbal picture of a lively five-year-old's lived experience of church from the child's "sense-full" perspective:

Scene I. The balcony of the sanctuary.

> Larry, five and a half years old, arrives and takes his place on the front row.
> During the four minute prelude and invocation he—
> swings his feet, drops his church school leaflet and picture,
> picks both up,
> looks under the pew while on the floor,
> uses the leaflet as a fan,
> waves to Billy and his family with the leaflet,
> waves to the Smiths who are smiling at him,
> stands,
> leans on the balcony rail,
> identifies friends from the aerial view,
> notices the contrast of bald heads and bouffant hairstyles,
> contemplates the leaflet in his hand,
> recalls Mother's reaction when the last leaflet was dropped,
> resumes his seat,
> holds his legs out stiffly,

crosses and uncrosses his legs several times,
strokes the velvet pew cushion, the wooden arm of the pew, and the rough texture of the hymnbook,
runs his finger along the sharp bulletin edge,
stands as the minister begins the invocation,
picks up the rhythm of the pulpit voice and drums it on the balcony rail,
shifts from one foot to the other, still keeping time,
glances at the ceiling,
studies the height, the play of the sun through the skylight, and the oak beams radiating from a central circle,
squints to test the effect,
lies down in the pew to get a better view of the ceiling,
kicks his brother in the process,
dodges his brother's retaliating kick,
moves over and stands again to make room for Mother who is changing places,
runs his finger along the inside of the book rack,
examines a ball of dust gleaned there,
returns to his study of the ceiling,
holds his hand up to see the contrast of distant space and light,
stretches higher, still higher, still…
Larry's mother, assisting him from the floor with less than gentle hands, says through clenched teeth, "Be still! Be quiet! Be good!" (pp. 4-6)

Through this vivid account, we, too, can experience the many intriguing details of this particular environment noticed by an alert and curious five-year-old.

Although we mentally acknowledge the sensory acuities of children, we often dismiss them. Instead of encouraging their expression and development, we tend to suppress them as inconveniences, much as does the distracted mother, rather than to celebrate their enrichment of our orderly lives. Since children live mainly in a pre-reflective mode, their verbal observations of their surroundings understandably do not measure up to the detailed description above. I found it challenging to elicit details of their physical surroundings from the children, although the adults' memories were often rich in minutiae. However, it became apparent through the interviews that the children did experience the built environment of the church corporeally, often in surprising ways.

Although children are remarkably adaptable and seemingly oblivious to their physical surroundings at times, they are sensitive to them. We might ask whether their flexibility and adaptability is an age characteristic, or whether it is grounded in an awareness that their preferences will meet with disregard or disdain from those in control.

Reflecting their individual personalities and preferences, children experienced their church settings in various sensate modes. Solely to provide a format in which to reflect on them, I arranged examples of children's responses to their environments according to the five physical senses; in no way was this arrangement an attempt to categorize their experiences into discrete Aristotelian classifications. Rather, my intention was that, taken together, the examples would be a rich representation of corporeal experience.

Tactile/Kinaesthetic

It is axiomatic that young children experience the world tactilely and interact with it in a vigorously kinetic way. "Don't touch!" and "Stop squirming!" are the recurring refrains of childhood. The interviewed adults often recalled vivid impressions of the church environment as they experienced it as young children. Sometimes the strongest impressions were negative ones:

> *It was a big room, cold room, tile floor, cement block wall, windows up high, toys on the floor, only one door – the one we came in by* [actually, there was another door to the outside at the far end and another door into the storeroom]. *There was a piano in the room, bright overhead lights.* (Helena, age 54, recalling experiences at age 6)

> *Yeah, it* [the Sunday School space] *was like a hall, outside of the church. It was really cold, like, an old building. It had wooden floors. Like, I remember it always being really, really cold. Like, just a big open room with like a kitchen in the back where we used to all line up and get a snack after we finished crafts and reading and stuff. Yeah, just a big open room and in the front there was a board where we used to talk and write stuff on the board and stuff like that. And there were little chairs.* (Felisha, age 18)

It was an older church, probably built in 1800s, a stone building, very grand, very cold, quite intimidating to a youngster. It had the stained glass windows. It was quite dark inside. The minister, Rev. Dr. Black, was a very stern man. I never, ever did see him smile. The church service was between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. It was usually the morning service we went to. You started off the service; at a certain time, perhaps around 11:30 we'd go off to Sunday School. It was held in a separate building behind the church. We'd all troop down with the Sunday School Superintendent. There were various books for different ages. We were all in the same room. We were in Sunday School for about one-and-a-half hours. We did games and had a bit of a social time. The games were outside. It was good to get out of the church. My sister is 17 months older than I and we were in church. I had a bad coughing fit. My mother was one of these people who did a lot in the church. The minister stopped the service and said, "Would you mind taking Norma out?" which she did do. It was very embarrassing. That was the kind of man he was. I didn't find him very warm. The overall impression - cold, dark [repeats this phrase later in the interview] *and intimidating. The inside of the church seemed very big, it held 300 to 400. It was stone inside. There were wooden pews, some in the centre with sections on both sides. The windows didn't let in much light; they were dark Victorian windows. There was the altar.* (Norma, age 60s, adult recalling childhood experiences in Northern Ireland in the late forties)

These three adults all remembered spaces as 'cold.' For Felisha, her Sunday School hall was physically cold, due to the fact that it was an old, wooden building and no doubt poorly insulated. While she continued to share very positive and happy memories of her years in that church, one of her foremost memories was of a cold space. Helena's and Norma's memories of coldness were connected to the atmosphere of the space as much as to the temperature. Helena's memory was of the first time her parents left in a room with strangers and of feeling afraid:

Mom and Dad took me to the nursery; I remember standing in the big room with another adult talking to Mom and Dad. I knew they were going to leave me there and I didn't want to be left alone; I was petrified – didn't know anyone, what was I supposed to do? There were other kids playing at the far end of the room. I hid behind one of my parents. A woman asked, "What's your name?" I didn't reply. Dad said, "Tell her your name." I hung onto his pant leg. I ***think*** *I was kind of upset that he wouldn't pick me up. He gave my name. The woman asked, "How old are you?" I wouldn't say. Dad, "Why won't you tell her how old you are? Tell her how old you are." I cried.*

Helena's memory mirrored Norma's recollections of the church she attended as a little girl in Northern Ireland. Norma, too, had unpleasant memories associated with the space to which her parents brought her. Both women remembered the building being of cold materials – cement block, tile and stone; ironically, the coldness seemed to be emphasised both by the bright overhead lights in the one room and by the darkness in the other. For both women, the spaces were forbiddingly big to them as little children. Helena eventually overcame her acute shyness and insecurity, helped along the way by warm and caring adult care-givers, and spent many happy hours in the nursery room, building friendships that would last until she moved away as a young adult. Helena also remembered the foyer of the church as being the place *where people patted me on the head.* Although Norma had happy memories of her Sunday School experience in a separate building, she never developed warmer impressions of the church which she continued to attend until the family moved away when she was in her upper teens. The main church remained a cold, dark, intimidating structure. I wonder how Norma's experience of the remote, stern and unsmiling minister factored into her experience of the physical space? Was the remembered chill created or augmented by the (perceived) cold demeanour of the minister to whom she represented an inconvenience?

Smooth wooden pews, inviting carving, unpredictable chairs, intriguing little cup-holders. Objects that provided memorable tactile experiences were those objects or furnishings that lay outside of everyday life and were most distinctive to churches:

> *I remember standing in the aisle, perhaps waiting for Mom or Dad to finish talking to someone, and running my fingers along the indentations of the crosses that were carved into the wood. I can remember running my hands along the edge of the pews which were so sharp.* (Willa, age 40s, adult recalling early childhood experiences)

I mentioned the theatre seats that our old sanctuary had. They were hard to lie down and sleep in as each had an arm rest. If you were not careful as a little person your rear end could go right down and the chair would practically fold up on you. (Clive, age 50s, recalling early childhood experiences in church where his father was pastor)

Before they got the pews covered with cushions you used to be able to slide around on them and it was quite fun. I remember, when they covered the pews, they had a project to get them covered, how disappointing it was to sit on the pews and not slide on them any more... And also getting your fingers stuck in the communion cup holders. [C. A.: And did you ever get your fingers stuck and you couldn't get them out?] Yes, and you'd have a momentary panic. And I still do that on occasion, stick my fingers in for fun, and see, it's harder and harder to get them out as you get older [laughs]. (Matt, age 40)

But also I loved to swing my legs on the pew, and the pew had a board from the front of the pew down to the floor. So the first thing my mother would do would be to take my shoes off, so I wouldn't bang on the board because my legs were short and would not reach the floor. So that is one thing I remember distinctly. The pews were shiny and I could slide on them. They were somewhat formed to fit the body a little bit, but I loved to swing my legs, but hitting the heels on the back of this board was, of course, a problem. (Roderick, 60s, adult recalling experience at age 3)

One can empathize with the little person (such as Clive), struggling to stay awake during a service, under the eye of Pastor Dad, sliding down into sleepy oblivion, only to be rudely snapped awake by an aggressive chair – and feeling slightly betrayed. Much more fun to slide along slippery pews, until restrained by parents whose patience had run out. Sliding is usually associated with the joy of childhood – sliding down a playground slide, down a water slide, down a banister. One senses here the same enjoyment of an innocent childhood pleasure, but in quite a different venue. Willa's memory of the smooth and sharp edges of the pews that invited her touch has a more reflective tone to it. Standing quietly and obediently while waiting for mom or dad, what impression did the engraved crosses leave in her fingers?

For many of those interviewed, both older and younger, early childhood and church is associated with restriction of movement. Older interviewees remembered the ordeal of having to sit still for periods of an hour or so, while the children interviewed often complained about having to sit still for twenty minutes. Perpetual motion seems to be an inalienable childhood right (bearing in mind those who are physically unable). Young children especially appear to have boundless energy which demands an outlet; and in fact, consistent physical activity is necessary for healthy development, including social and emotional development (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002). Their legitimate need to move about presents unique challenges to those who think deeply about children's place within the worshipping community and who struggle to find appropriate ways to make worship meaningful for all ages. Sitting quietly, even if for short periods of time, is also an important requirement for spiritual development. I will explore this concept later in this chapter.

While opportunities and freedom to run and play were experienced by children as comfort and hospitality that allowed them to feel that "this is my place" as explored in the lifeworld of relationality, the limitation on movement was prominently expressed as discomfort:

C. A.: *Kids' ideas are very important. What do you like about church?*

Seamus: *I don't like the sitting down.*

C. A.: *Are there things that you do like?*

Seamus: *I like the person who gives me cookies.*

C. A.: *Are there any places in the church that you like?*

Seamus: *The gym.*

C. A.: *The gym. How come the gym?*

Seamus: *You get to run around in it.* (Seamus, age 7)

C. A.: *Can you tell me what isn't your favourite part, like, are there any places in the church that you don't like?*

Ella: *Oh, sitting.*

C. A.: *Oh, sitting, that's what you don't like to do.*

Ella: *And being quiet.*

C. A.: *Oh, that's not so much fun either.*

Ella: *It's boring.*

C. A.: *What places do you have to sit and be quiet in?*

Ella: *The church, on the chairs* [the pews]. (Ella, age 4)

C. A.: *Do you think there should be special spaces in the church just for children?*

Caitlyn: *Well, some children get kind of fidgety sitting in the pews after a while, and they like going downstairs and playing and everything; but I did that when I was young too. As I got older, I enjoyed more being with the adults and listening to Paul.* (Caitlyn, age 9)

Seamus, Ella and Caitlyn all attend a church where the children do not have to sit for more than twenty minutes; during those twenty minutes they also stand for a hymn and move to the front of the church for their story time. Time – even twenty minutes – can seemingly stretch beyond comfort for this age. For an older adult, growing up in a different age, the punishment was of a different intensity:

C. A: *In the summer time, would the windows be open?*

Martin: *Oh yeah, often in the summer time windows would be open and the men would stay outside.*

C. A.: *During the service?*

Martin: *Yeah, but they would stand near the windows so that they could hear the sermon. But like I say, they could also have a smoke while they were outside. If somebody had to talk to somebody else about something they had to do on Tuesday, Let's say that Joe the farmer wanted to bring in a couple of fields of hay on Tuesday – most of the guys worked together, so if somebody needed help somebody else would go and help him. So he might talk to Fred the farmer and Bill the farmer and they would arrange it.*

C. A.: *During the sermon?*

Martin: *Well, yeah, while they are standing out in the church yard, they'd arrange this so they wouldn't have to – cause telephones weren't a big thing then. If Bill was coming from W___ B____ Mountain to M____ Mountain to help farmer Fred, then the only way Fred would get to tell Bill was when he saw him on Sunday that he wanted do this, that or whatever. Not everyone had a vehicle and most of them didn't have time to hook up a horse and travel ten miles or whatever to make these arrangements, so when they met at church they'd get things arranged. This is a different time.*

C. A.: *It's just fascinating. I'm just trying to get this picture. Just men were allowed to stand outside by the windows* [in the summer heat]*? Women and kids all had to sit inside?*

Martin: *Well, the women were – women back then, women were really – even though they didn't have as big a part in church – back then you wouldn't hear of a female deacon or female minister or whatever,* ***but*** *the women were basically the religious leaders of the family. So, you know, they went into church, sat in the heat, listened to the minister inside the church, while – not all men stayed outside the church. Don't get me wrong, they didn't all stay outside the church, but those that wanted to, they could stand on the shady side of the church. Well, I mean, if there was no breeze blowing [laughs] you sat there and got soaked, because you couldn't move and you didn't take your neck-tie off. Now looking back, you could almost say it was corporal punishment,* [laughs] *but, you know, we didn't see it that way. That was our lives, you know. That's the way it was.* (Martin, adult recalling childhood experiences in the fifties in rural Nova Scotia)

Sight

Children watch. They notice. A number of the children interviewed talked about things they saw in church which intrigued, puzzled or delighted them. I have chosen to include most of the visual experiences in the discussion of the lifeworld of spatiality, because they reveal how children relate to the space of the church. However, to help us to begin to see the child's church-world through their eyes, here are several accounts of children's visual perceptions:

> *One of my favourite things is watching Paul when he is up there. I look at what he is wearing because he's usually wearing something different and usually there are flowers around and I admire them. They look really pretty, they look almost real, they're so pretty. Usually for a little while I stare at the windows and the things on the walls, and sometimes try to figure out what they mean because they don't have something to describe what they mean. So I try to figure it out.* (Caitlyn, age 9)

> *It was a weird building, big heavy woodwork, big doors, roll-top-desk-like walls that came down. Parts of it were a little scary. There were big rooms and not many people. There were strange passageways between the sanctuary, places you didn't go. There was a pastor's study that hadn't been a pastor's study for years. The vestry had an outside door. I was there a lot – Saturday night with my father. I used to explore and watch the men play volleyball.* (Gerard, adult)

> Roderick: *One vivid memory is of _____ who was the minister at the time. At the end of the service upstairs, and oh, the Sunday School would end, and we could hear the feet upstairs moving and _____ would come down to that door near the steps where we had come in and that's where he would greet everybody. One Sunday for some unknown reason, we were allowed out of Sunday School – apparently they were mis-queued when we came out, because they weren't out yet – and I was standing by the door waiting for my parents to come downstairs. I'd be only five or six, and _____ came down in flowing black gown, Geneva Bands and a collar, and all that, and I thought it was Jesus Himself coming down and I was just standing there. And he came and stood beside me and started shaking hands. I was quite entranced by this image. I remember reaching out and feeling the gown thinking that he won't know that I'm feeling this gown, just to see what it's made of, like the woman touching the hem of Jesus' garment. That was one of the first little images, awareness of clergy.*
>
> C. A.: *Did he recognize you as a child? Did he acknowledge you at all?*

Roderick: *Oh yes, he knew who my parents were and all that. It's the first time I had seen him in his gown and that was quite impressive. I wasn't quite sure it wasn't Jesus, except it was black instead of white. Jesus wore white, I thought.*

C. A.: *Well, you don't have to, but I was thinking if you planned a church, how would you like it to look?*

Alleyn: *Well, I guess comforting and nice so people would like it and stuff and organized I guess. I wouldn't want it dirty.*

C. A.: *That's a very good point. How do you think our church stacks up?*

Alleyn: *I think it's really good, because it's not dirty at all. The seats are comfortable. In some churches the seats are hard. It's clean, I like that.* (Alleyn, age 9)

Who would have thought that a nine-year-old boy would be concerned about a dirty room or building?

Taste

The sense of taste was experienced in a variety of ways. Liturgically-speaking, in the religious tradition to which most of the interviewees belonged, children do not generally partake of Communion or the Lord's Supper (the Eucharist in other traditions). Communion is reserved for those who have been baptised as believers, which usually does not happen until late childhood or adolescence when persons are judged to have the capacity to make informed decisions.

For this reason, one of the most overtly religious taste sensations – tasting the Communion elements – was not available to the children I interviewed. Most children were in their own programs while adults observed Communion and, thus, didn't have the opportunity to be curious about it. Clark, now in his seventies, remembered sitting in church when the Communion elements were being passed and wanting to take them. His

father said, "No. Someday you'll be able to." Clark wasn't upset about it, realising that Communion was something special for when you got older.

However, another perspective was shared by Matt, now forty years old and very active in his church:

> *I do recall an incident with* [his Sunday School teacher]. *I was probably in Grade 5 or 6. We had been studying The Lord's – Last Supper and we had started doing part of our – a small communion-type-thing within our classroom. I remember that someone from the church, I don't know if it was the Sunday School superintendent or what – told us we couldn't do it any more. That was quite an upsetting thing for us and for the teacher, at the time. We were talking about it and we were doing it.*

While this incident was solely a theological issue for the church elder, it was a pedagogical issue for the teacher and a distress and disappointment to all the children. Matt indicated that the class never really understood the rationale for the superintendent's reaction. Within the believer's church tradition, which is ostensibly non-sacramental, the approach to Communion can be confusing to adherents and members. This confusion is especially true in regard to children who learn best by doing.

In a non-liturgical sense, taste (food) appeared to be an important component of a positive church experience. Shannon, Adrienne, Jill and Lisa represented this perspective:

> C. A.: *The first question I'm going to ask you is about the church you go to now, and I'd like to know what you favourite spaces are in the church.*
>
> Shannon: *I guess when we go downstairs.*
>
> C. A.: *That's where you like to go. What is it about that space that you like?*
>
> Shannon: *That we sing songs, because I like to sing.*
>
> C. A.: *You like to sing.*
>
> Shannon: *And we get to eat, because most times I get hungry.*

C. A.: *You get hungry. It's a long time from when we have breakfast until we have a feast*[6]*, isn't it?*

Shannon: *And I like listening to stories about God.* (Shannon, age 7)

C. A.: *Can you tell me anything about the church you go to?*

Adrienne: *I like the ending of it.*

C. A.: *Can you describe,what it is like?*

Adrienne: *It's where they invite you for food.* (Adrienne, age 5)

Jill: *I like the pot-luck suppers.* (Jill, age 11)

C. A: *Are there any parts of the church building that are your favourite?*

Lisa: *Probably when we go to the vestry for snacks. In summer we have DVBS* [Daily Vacation Bible School]. *It's a favourite time. We play a lot of games, we have snacks, we do crafts, we sing.* (Lisa, age 8)

Eight-year-old Lisa, with all the confidence of an acclaimed architect, expressed her views about improving her church building. In reference to the space for post-worship fellowship and refreshments, she strongly recommended:

> *It needs to be more spacious. Kids should have time and a table in the vestry, and adults another time and table – so kids can get the food they like.*

When asked to draw a church of her own design, Nicola (age 9) drew a charming, detailed picture which bore strong similarities to the church she presently attends – with the striking addition of a Subway© restaurant at one end. She thought that would be a good thing to have so *in case people got hungry at church they wouldn't have to go home to get something to eat.* [see picture on next page]

[6] The term 'feast' is used to refer to the snack that is a ritual part of this children's worship time.

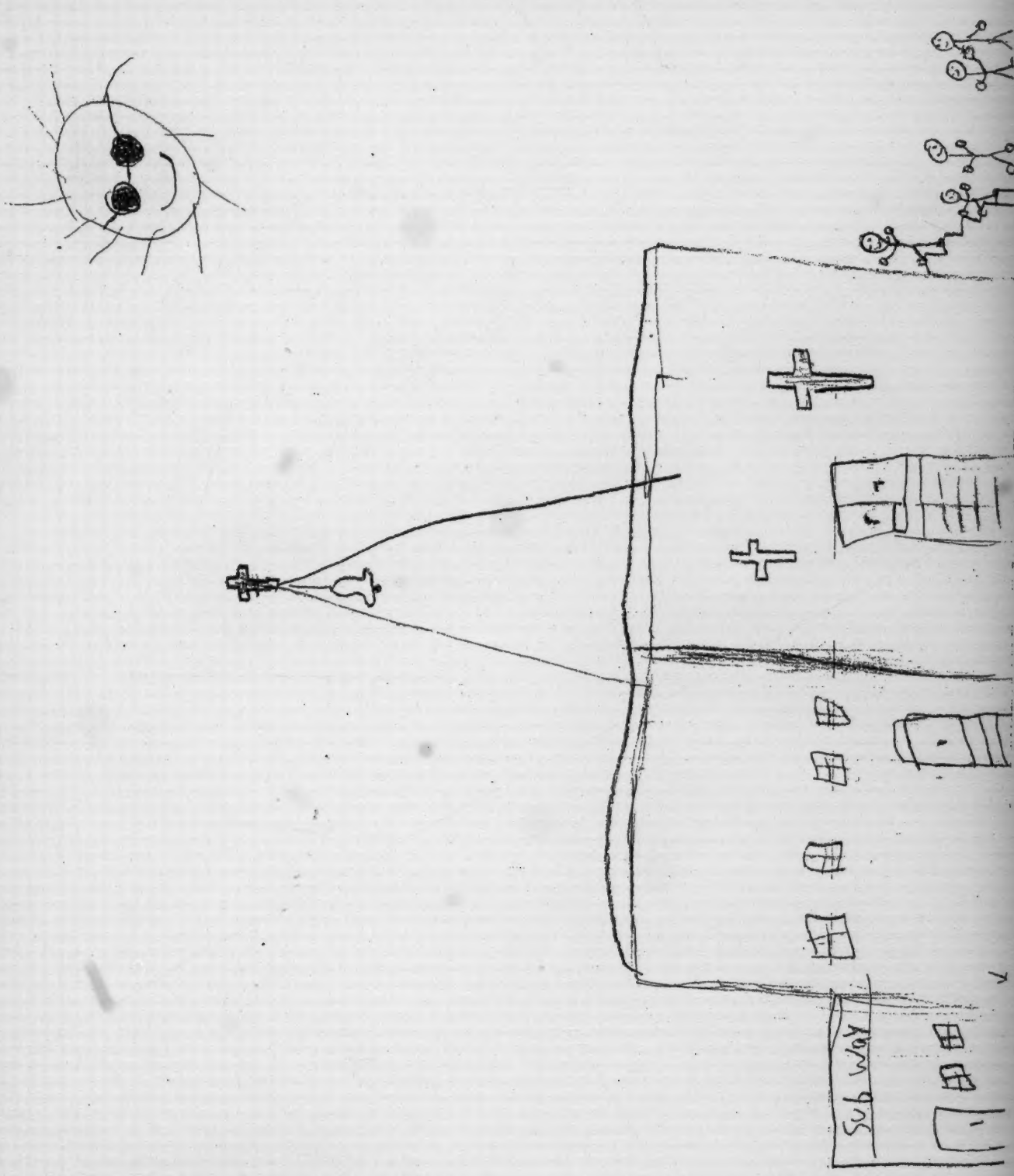

Figure 3: Church by Nicola, age 9

Five-year-old Susie was also definite about the primary reason for liking her nanny's church (which she attends during the summer for Vacation Bible School): *When I'm having a snack at the end of the day, like at the end of the day they have snacks.* Even Matt, who had the upsetting experience with Communion in his elementary class, had strong, pleasant memories of food:

> *I also remember Mission Band too, and _____ made this very flat bread in a frying pan for one of the Mission Band activities. [C.A.: Ah-hah. Nan, because they were in India.] Yeah. Oh yeah, and then there were the Mission Band – there was a dinner, it was a special dinner, a celebration thing, I'm not sure – hamburger and macaroni casserole, that was one of the things. It was after church and everybody stayed and it was sort of like a party. I'll have to ask my mother what it was. But I think it was macaroni and hamburger.* [laughter] *Not that – we had that at home, but – macaroni casserole. It was a big thing.*

In the children's worship time in which I frequently participate or lead, food has a ritualistic presence, following Montessori's approach of mindfulness in all things. A 'feast' time is a regular part of our time together. The children take part in the serving of our feast, which usually consists of water (nothing to stain carpet or clothes), crackers, cheese, and sometimes fruit. On special occasions in the church year, special foods for that season may be added as a treat. In our gathering circle on the carpet, everyone spreads out a white paper napkin to make a personal 'table' on which to place their food and drink; all wait until everyone is served and a blessing is asked before eating (sometimes a difficult thing to do!). Although the snack is simple, it is obviously important to the children and they express disappointment whenever it is skipped as occasionally happens in the interests of time.

On an immediate and overt level, I suspect the children appreciate the time simply because it comes late-morning and they may be getting hungry. However, at a deeper, unconscious level, I wonder if this time serves another purpose. As Jane Bone (2005)

suggests in her study of food habits in three different pre-school settings in New Zealand, food can become a theme to study in terms of everyday spirituality. "By using this concept it is possible to think of 'breaking bread' in early childhood settings as a spiritual activity, rather than a mundane event, as a 'rite' rather than a routine" (p. 315). By treating reverently the food, the serving of it and eating it together, are we creating a space for the children to experience community (and by extension, communion)? After the formalities of serving and blessing, our feast time is the most relaxed time of the session, as we share what has happened in our respective lives during the past week – highlights, disappointments and the ordinariness of everyday life that can still be full of wonder and pleasure for children. I hope for these children that they experience, even in a limited way, some of the potential aspects of 'breaking bread' as articulated by Jane Bone:

> From a spiritual perspective 'breaking bread' implies feeding body and soul, having space to share and time for appreciation and social interaction, an opportunity for spiritual renewal. In the early childhood context 'breaking bread', in its symbolic and literal sense, is a way of encouraging harmony, affirming life, celebrating change, connecting with a variety of philosophical beliefs and a means of honouring the spirit of the child. (p. 316)

Smell

Nothing is more memorable than a smell. Several adults immediately recalled childhood experiences that were based on olfactory sensations. Of the sense of smell, Ackerman (1990) wrote, "Unlike the other senses, smell needs no interpreter. The effect is immediate and undiluted by language, thought, or translation. A smell can be overwhelmingly nostalgic because it triggers powerful images and emotions before we have time to edit them" (p. 11). Clive relates just such an experience:

The traumatic ordeal of our sanctuary burning is strong. Dad said he was sitting in the tub and quite discouraged about the fund-raising for our new sanctuary and was praying that if the Lord did not want the newly-begun sanctuary to continue for the Lord to just burn it down. Little did he know that the sirens he heard while bathing were fire trucks heading for our old sanctuary which was gutted by fire that day. When he took us over to see the damage and we saw the smoke rising from the charred theatre seats my sense of smell was alert. To this day on occasion I'm somewhere when something is burning and I am right back standing in front of the wreckage. I can only imagine as an adult the feelings and anxiety Dad must have experienced through that season of his ministry. (Clive, adult recalling childhood experiences in Minnesota)

Interestingly, most of the experiences associated with smell were described in negative terms. Although this was initially disappointing to me, upon reflection it was not surprising. The smells associated with more formal, liturgical traditions – incense, beeswax candles, etc. – are absent from the tradition represented in this research. Considering the numerous references in the Bible to lovely fragrances associated with worship and prayer, this absence could open a lively conversation. What smells did the children notice in their places of worship?

The earliest memories of being in church– I think when you first come in through the door and you notice that certain smell -- of polished wood, almost like a Varathane – that you really notice when you're a kid.... A part downstairs wasn't all that appealing. It was sort of long, and along one wall, one door in the middle. Although it had toys in it, it was not the cleanest. It was dingy, yeah, and musty, a bit. (Matt, age 40, adult recalling childhood)

Felisha: *I remember it smelled really weird, old books.*

C. A.: *A musty kind of smell?*

Felisha: *Yeah! I remember my brother used to say it out loud that the church smells and my Mom used to get really mad.* (Felisha, age 18)

C. A.: *Can you tell me what you like and what you don't like about that room?*

Janey: *Well, the thing I don't like, sometimes, it smells when the people are there. The sound echoes. The thing I do like is when my Mom talks, and we sing songs. We do children's stories.* (Janey, pastor's daughter, age 7)

Ackerman claimed, "One of the real tests of writers, especially poets, is how well they write about smells. If they can't describe the scent of sanctity in a church, can you trust them to describe the suburbs of the heart?" (1990, p. 18). The lack of evidence for a "scent of sanctity" experienced by the children I interviewed interests me. Because this notion is so foreign to my particular religious tradition, it is a subject I would like to pursue in the future.

Hearing

From the ridiculous to the sublime – children's experiences with sound in the church reflected the gamut of human experience. Sound could conjure a terrifying monster:

> *When I was aged three to four, I was taken down by my older sister to the nursery. I was terrified of the monster that I knew lived behind the doors with the big holes in them, because I could hear the noise it made, and I knew the big round holes had been made to let air in so the creature could breathe. I would sometimes cry so my sister would stay with me, but I never told anyone why I was so scared. Much later I learned that the doors were the access to the crawl space for the hot-water pipes that ran under the floor of the sanctuary for the in-floor heating system; the groaning sound was the expansion-contraction of the pipes as they heated up or cooled down.* (Willa, adult recalling experiences at age 3-4)

The absence of sound could evoke the presence of the Divine:

> Alicia: (visiting Senlis Cathedral): *We walked in and it was **so quiet**, so nice, so **big**. God was everywhere.* (Alicia, age 12)

On Silence

Alicia's father (a minister and seminary lecturer) commented on his surprise at her very uncharacteristic response whenever they entered a Gothic cathedral during their three months in France – uncharacteristic because Alicia was the family extrovert, the chatterbox who talked non-stop. When entering Senlis Cathedral for the first time, Alicia's voice immediately dropped to a whisper, and remained there throughout their

tour of the cathedral. This was Alicia's pattern for every cathedral visit, regardless if there were other people present within the church or not. For Alicia, the soaring space and the silence produced over-powering sensations which, for her, evoked the Divine.

Bachelard quotes from Henri Bosco's novel, *Malicroix,* the following passage which seems to speak to a similar experience as Alicia's, albeit in a natural setting:

> There is nothing like silence to suggest a sense of unlimited space. Sounds lend color to space, and confer a sort of sound body upon it. But absence of sound leaves it quite pure and, in the silence, we are seized with the sensation of something vast and deep and boundless. It took complete hold of me and, for several moments, I was overwhelmed by the grandeur of this shadowy peace. (Bosco, quoted in Bachelard, 1994, p. 43)

Equally noteworthy was the response of nine-year-old Jason, who from my observations was a very active and self-confident boy:

> C. A.: *Do you think there should be special spaces in churches just for kids?*
>
> Jason: *Yeah, there should be some place where they can actually play; and a quiet spot, and a place with toys where they can play.* (Jason, age 9)

I'm not sure if Jason himself would spend much time in *a quiet spot*, but it was something that he felt was important for a church to have for its children. The notion of going to a quiet spot when one craves respite or solitude is far removed from the enforced silence Martin remembered from his childhood:

> *When you walked through the door it was like you pulled a zipper across your lips, you weren't to talk in church, you didn't make any unnecessary noises in church. You didn't take toys to play with, nothing like it is today. That's the way it was back then. We didn't see it any different. Of course when we got outside, we'd take a deep breath and then you could talk, and laugh and do whatever we liked. It was just one of those things. You didn't talk in church and you didn't laugh unless the minister said something funny.* (Martin, adult)

Sitting in isolation at the front of the church, Germaine experienced a similar stern attitude to noise and the noise-maker:

C. A.: *What did you notice while you were sitting there?*

Germaine: *The hymnbook. I would sit and flip through the hymnbook through the whole service. Apparently it was on the radio and that's what they would hear. I remember someone coming to me and asking if I could turn the pages more quietly.* (Germaine, adult)

As I have reflected on the paradox of sound and silence within the church, and children's experiences of both, I have become increasingly concerned. In this regard, I am not alone, as more and more religious educators, as well as public school educators, are increasingly directing their attention to the lack of silence in formal learning environments. On the public side, a recent e-mail from the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education came right to the point, announcing a call for papers with this announcement, "In the spring of 2008, the Council of 3M National Teaching Fellows will publish a book that examines silence and teaching in a multitude of ways – *Silence in Teaching and Learning*" (received 14 April 2007). Patricia Clifford, a public school teacher, comments, "'Manic pace is cultivated in elementary schools. Teachers getting kids to run from place to place, activity to activity. All noise and no sounds. Quiet is undervalued as only the quiet of straight rows – made to be quiet by somebody, not being quiet'" (quoted in Jardine, 2000, p. 11).

Religious educators also have been reflecting deeply on the sound and pace of children's religious training programs. Foremost in the field is Jerome Berryman, an Episcopalian priest who has served as hospital chaplain with seriously ill and dying children. He founded the Center for the Theology of Childhood in Houston and is best known for developing "Godly Play," an approach to children's spiritual formation that encourages quiet reflection on stories adapted from the Bible. Berryman (2004) draws on current understandings of brain function to argue for the importance of silence in

religious knowing. He suggests that the limbic brain system, which is the location for nonverbal communication and the centre for human emotions, may also be the location for spirituality. The limbic system moves the human being in ways that the neocortex, which is the site for speaking, writing, planning and reasoning, can only imprecisely translate into language. Poetry can be the language that bridges the gap between the neocortex and the limbic system.

> The Christian language system is a complex repository of such 'poetry.' There are sacred stories, parables, and liturgical gestures combined with words in addition to silence in this linguistic domain. Most of this language functions more like poetry than the propositions, explanations, and descriptions, which dominate most professional discourse. Christian language, then, is most appropriate for connecting the limbic system and the neocortex. It works in an indirect way, which surprises one from time to time with the grace of discoveries. The use of reason, logic, and tradition are needed to guard this language system against misuse, but they do not have this poetic power to evoke what is silent in human relationships. (p. 33)

The following poem, written for a children's book on sacred space, speaks this language of silence:

Hush,
this is a holy place,
a sacred place,
where the visions dwell,
where the dreaming
of a race began.
Someone's God
has stepped here,
slept here,
knelt here,
spoken here of life, of death,
of holy things.
When you come,
come softly,
walk softly,
talk softly,
be mindful of the dreams.
This place is a sacred place.
Hush.
(Yolen, 1996, p. 9)

Berryman (2004) contends that children can demonstrate a connection with God "by their very being and can truly guide us toward mature spirituality by their knowing silence" (p. 33) because of the strength of the nonverbal communication system. I think of 6-year-old Caleb, a rather shy and sweet-natured boy, who isn't very verbal around adults outside of his family – he declined being interviewed for this research. However, I have observed Caleb closely during the Children's Worship times I often lead. He watches intently as I tell the story. He enjoys singing, albeit not too loudly, and blushes self-consciously but with a smile when I suggest, "Let's sing Caleb's favourite song this morning."

Following the Montessorian method, the children are encouraged to work creatively on their own during their 'work time.' Caleb will often appear silently at my side and hold out his creation. One morning it is a green play-dough nest with three large blue eggs in it; prompted by a few leading questions, he divulges the information that they have discovered a robin's nest in their yard that they will keep watch on. At Easter, he shows me a large, intricately-coloured Easter egg he has drawn and cut out of paper – not a single word escapes him but his shining eyes and sweet smile speak volumes. What is he communicating to me through his 'knowing silence'? His mother has informed me that Caleb loves the orderly routine and slow pace of the Children's Worship, yet Caleb is also a very active child, who loves to run and to shoot basketball in the gym. What does this gentle, paced space provide for his spirit?

> "Where do you like doing best in the world, Pooh?" … "I like that too," said Christopher Robin, "but what I like *doing* best is Nothing."
> "How do you do Nothing?" asked Pooh, after he had wondered for a long time.

"Well, it's when people call out at you just as you're going off to do it, 'What are you going to do, Christopher Robin?' and you say, 'Oh, nothing,' and then you go and do it."
"Oh, I see," said Pooh.
"This is a nothing sort of thing that we're doing now."
"Oh, I see," said Pooh again.
"It means just going along, listening to all the things you can't hear, and not bothering."
"Oh!" said Pooh. (Milne, 2002, p. 309)

Despite my attempts to develop and provide moments of thoughtful silence within the order of Children's Worship, I remain anxious about the children's response or lack of response. What am I looking for? Alicia's response to the silence and size of Senlis, the toddler's response to the quiet atmosphere of the Tenebrae service, and Jason's recommendation for *a quiet spot*, were the only recognisable evidences I caught of children's experiences of silence. I remain troubled by this lack, especially in light of the Montessorian perspective that "when the child achieves the self-mastery of silence, he or she has become aware of another deeper dimension of the self" (Schmid, 1997, p. 45). Do children in my tradition have so few opportunities to encounter genuine silence that they are unable to recognise it, or remain perplexed or uneasy with it? Enforced silence, "being made to be quiet by somebody," especially while adults continue to talk incessantly, is not the same as reflective silence, "being quiet." Perhaps, as Berryman suggests, it is I who needs to be more attuned to the children and to recognise the small grace-notes of "knowing silence" that I, as a researcher looking for the dramatic or at least the definite, fail to notice.

Perhaps the ancients got it right. In Egyptian mythology, the god-child, Horus, was represented as a naked boy holding a finger to his lips; also known as the Sun-God, Horus, the child of Osiris, was supposed to carry on daily war against the powers of

darkness. The Greeks, mistaking the Egyptian gesture symbolising childhood for a hush of silence, transformed Horus, now Harpocrates, into the god of silence and secrecy (Meeks, 2007; Waddington, 1973). Furthermore, the Greeks, beginning with Pythagoras, developed a strong philosophical and rhetorical tradition that associated silence with wisdom and truth (Waddington, 1973). This association of the image of the child with silence and wisdom strongly appeals to me, as I struggle to bring theory into practice.

David Jardine (1998) speaks to my anxiety to be more pro/active in nurturing spirituality in children, and to teach my seminary students how to "do" this more effectively. He writes:

> This [gathering data as it is given or granted], for me, is a holy metaphor for the act of teaching. We cannot *will* maturity in our children. We must wait, listen, and act exquisitely (i.e., act in response to what is called for, not just because we *can* act). To make our actions "exquisite," we must clear way the rattle and hum of unnecessary, uncalled-for action and noisy announcements, so that the need to act can begin to stand out. We must begin to believe again that silence may be our most articulate response, Silence must become possible again. In the midst of silence, a word, a gesture, a cry, can finally *mean* something, because we can finally hear, finally listen. (p. 30)

Although Jardine is writing primarily for the arena of public education, his words have a profound theological implication. Too often, we forget that God spoke out of the "sheer silence" to Elijah (1 Kings 19:11-13), that the Psalmist adjured "be still and know" (Psalm 46:10), or that the Teacher recommended "a time to keep silence, and a time to speak" (Ecclesiastes 3:7). As I fret over making more meaningful silence available to children, and worrying over their responses to it, Jardine reminds *me* to be silent and to allow the children to speak to me in my silence. Or more fully yet, entering the silence with the children, as Russell Hoban (1972) suggests, "Hearing the silence is what the best teachers let themselves and their pupils do. And it is, of course, not teaching, but shared

being, shared development, creation" (p. 45). Parker Palmer (1998) adds his voice to this discourse with similar words of wisdom:

> Words are not the sole medium of exchange in teaching and learning – we educate with silence as well. Silence gives us a chance to reflect on what we have said and heard, and silence itself can be a sort of speech, emerging from the deepest parts of ourselves, of others, of the world… But in authentic education, silence is treated as a trustworthy matrix for the inner work students must do, a medium for learning of the deepest sort. (p. 77)

On Music

Another sound that children responded to was music. In some cases, it was as listeners, like nine-year-old Cassie who thought it was nice to *hear the piano playing*, eleven-year-old Dugald who *likes the organ music*, or fourteen-year-old Amos:

> Amos: (visiting St. Paul's Cathedral): *It was evensong and a boys' choir was singing – kind of like surround-sound – pretty cool.* (Amos, age 14)

Amos, who is growing up in a family that appreciates and provides a wide exposure to cultural experiences, may be atypical of most Canadian teenagers in thinking that a boys' choir in a Renaissance cathedral is *pretty cool*.

However, what emerged more strongly in this study is that many of the children interviewed responded to music as participants. They simply enjoyed singing:

> *I remember going to Sunday School, but I don't remember much, but I do remember a picture we have of being in Sunday School. There was a big room where we gathered to sing songs and I remember learning to sing songs like "Can A Little Child Like Me."* (Tara, age 30s, recalling preschool childhood)

> *I always loved the singing. One of my earliest memories of singing in church is – I loved the songs, the hymns that have choruses – had a repetitive – same words after every verse. I loved that because I couldn't read, but I could memorize the chorus so I'd be able to sing. That was at an early age. Going to lots of different churches for hymn-sings. There was a little, teeny-tiny church in – oh, I want to call it _____ which is between _____ and _____, a one-room church that didn't have much heat, it might just have had space heaters or something and they had it open like once a month for hymn sings in the summer time. I remember in the warmer months we used to go out there. Yeah, I remember loving the songs that had the*

choruses cause I could memorize those words. (Tara, age 30s, recalling childhood at age 6-7)

C. A.: *What is it about that space that you like?*

Shannon: *That we sing songs, because I like to sing.* (Shannon, age 7)

Ten-year-old Tessa says, *Well, I like the open session a lot* [at the beginning of Sunday School] – *the worship, the songs, the music.* Eleven-year-old Dugald likes singing in the Worship Band, as well as listening to the organ music. Seven-year-old Janey thinks it's cool that *we sing songs.*

I like Ackerman's claim (with a lovely marriage of senses) that "music, the perfume of hearing, probably began as a religious act" (1990, p. 202). Unfortunately, in many churches (regardless of denomination) music has become a contentious and divisive issue – organ versus guitar, choir versus worship band, screen versus hymn book – one person's perfume being another person's malodour. However, the only hint of this friction emerged in an interview with four teenagers, who were recalling their experiences as children. Two of the teens were sisters from a musical family.

C. A.: *Nateasha? How you felt, when you were in church?*

Nateasha: *I used to like the music, that's what I liked, listening to the choirs.*

C. A.: *So, it's the music part that's really big for all of you?*

Nateasha: *Yeah, I liked listening to the youth choirs but not so much the older people singing boring songs.*

C. A.: *What would be a boring song?*

Nateasha: *Like one out of the hymnal. Like the BYF would sing like more interesting stuff, sometimes they would do actions and stuff.* (Nateasha, age 17)

Nateasha also shared that her earliest memory of church was singing in the choir. *Singing in the Sunday School choir is a lot different than watching the choir. I find it's a lot more nerve-wracking.* Despite the nerves, both she and her sister, Nadine, continued to sing in the children's and, eventually, the adult choir. Nadine (age fifteen) is now an accomplished soloist.

A number of adult interviewees also had strong memories of church music in their lives as young children. Beth remembers as a young girl spontaneously singing a solo verse of "Jesus Loves Me" when the minister asked for a volunteer during the service – she doubts she would do it now. Karen joined the choir when she was about eleven and then she *could sit at the front and look down at the congregation.* For Ivy, who grew up in a tiny village church, music was a very rich experience, and for rural Nova Scotia in the fifties, remarkably varied:

Ivy: *Music was a very important part of it. Often people of the community would take part in the service.*

C. A.: *Okay. What kind of music?*

Ivy: *The old hymns – are what I remember most. It always takes me back to that little church – and to my grandmother's parlour, because we often had a Sunday-evening sing-song around the old organ at my grandmother's. And when our family got together we often had sing-songs, singing those old hymns – so they still bring back those same memories to me.*

C. A.: *What kind of musical instruments would you have in the church?*

Ivy: *We had a pump organ, the same as at my grandmother's home, and guitars. [C. A.: Oh, really.] We often had special guests. I can particularly remember playing on the glass bottles with liquid in them and they each would sound out the different notes.[C. A.: Oh, like a xylophone.]Yes, it was beautiful. We often had people come who were guest musicians.*

Most of the young children who attend Children's Worship, which I frequently lead, appear to enjoy singing. Six-year-old Stuart can often be heard humming the tune of a song sung earlier in the church service; he has a natural musician's gift for pitch and melody. Since we incorporate American Sign Language into many of the songs we sing, our music-making is a multi-sensory experience. Most of the children, including the youngest at age four, pick up the signs quickly and are able to remember them better than I can.

From my experience in a senior's residence where I led worship services once a month for three years, I realise how important music can be in one's life. The home had an Alzheimer's unit, and relatives of the residents would bring some of the residents to the service. On many occasions, an adult child would say of a mother or father, with tears in their eyes, "They don't remember me (or my name), but they can still sing the hymns they learned as a child." The children with whom I work enjoy singing the same songs over and over (even as they enjoy learning new ones), leading me to believe that some of the songs will be added to the permanent collection in their memory. Among interviewees of all ages, responding to music was a prominent expression of their experience of the house of the church.

Lived Time – Temporality

How is the existential lifeworld of lived time experienced in the lifeworld of the child within the particular lifeworld of the church? Lived time is defined by van Manen (1997) as subjective time as opposed to objective time (clock time). "Lived time is the time that appears to speed up when we enjoy ourselves, or slow down when we feel bored" (p. 104). The temporal way of being in the world encompasses the past, present and future and is reflected in the way in which one is oriented to life, whether as a young

person oriented to the possibilities of the future or as an older person recollecting the past.

Theologians more commonly use the Greek words *chronos* and *kairos* to delineate objective and subjective time (although these terms have become more popular in business and management circles recently, as for instance, in Covey, 1994). Fittingly, the ancient Greeks had two words for time: while chronos refers to chronological or sequential (quantitative) time, kairos means "propitious moment," "fullness of time" (Oxford English Dictionary; Baumgarten, 1981, p. 232). Kairos signifies 'a time in between' or opportune moment – an undetermined period of time (qualitative) in which 'something' special happens. In Greek mythology, Chronos (represented as an old man) was the personification of time, while Kairos (represented as a youth who was purported to be the youngest son of Zeus) was the personification of opportunity (Oxford Reference Online).

The contemporary author Madeleine L'Engle has probably done more to popularise the concept of kairos time than any other writer. In both her award-winning children's trilogy (beginning with *A Wrinkle in Time*) and in many of her adult, non-fiction books, she has written eloquently about time. In *A Circle of Quiet* (1972) she writes:

> Kairos is not measurable. Kairos is ontological. In kairos we *are*, we are fully in isness, not negatively, as Sartre saw the isness of the oak tree, but fully, wholly, positively. Kairos can sometimes enter, penetrate, break though chronos: the child at play, the painter at his easel, Serkin playing the *Appassionata*, are in kairos. The saint at prayer, friends around the dinner table, the mother reaching out her arms for her newborn baby, are in kairos. (p. 245)

The children, youth and adults whom I interviewed and observed were often caught up in chronos time – waiting for units of time to move along.

Nadine: *There was a clock at the back of the church and I knew if I looked back my Mom would think I was looking at the time.* (Nadine, age 15)

Perry: *I felt good, just hearing the word of the Lord. But I didn't like the time when they stayin' late. Too long.*

C. A.: *Would the services have been fairly long in that church?*

Perry: *Yeah. Way long.* (Perry, age 19)

C. A.: *If you could improve your church in any way, what would you do?*

Cassie: *For starters, I would have the pastor speak a little shorter.* (Cassie, age 9)

C.A.: *What parts of the worship service do you like best?*

Dugald: *I don't like the sermon that much, it's sometimes boring. I like the organ music.* (Dugald, age 11)

C. A.: *Oh, okay. Now, are there any places in the church that you don't like as much, as other places?*

Hermione: *I don't like it when you talk over there because it gets a little boring.*

C. A.: *You mean when I talk?*

Hermione: *No, I mean when Paul* [pastor, during Children's Time in service] *talks, it gets a little boring.*

C. A.: *When you have to sit in the front pew, you mean?*

Hermione: *Yeah, I just sit there for a little while.* (Hermione, age 6)

For these and other children, the chronos time of a traditional worship service seemed to stretch out endlessly. Parents can relate to the experience of hearing a plaintive little voice from the back seat of the car, six minutes into a six-hour trip, "Are we there yet?" North American children's lives are ruled by the demands of the clock: getting up early for school, the predictable routine of the school day, after-school activities that must

be met on time, and so-on and so-on. All around them, children hear the motto of our age, "Hurry up! We don't have much time!"

Recently, as I attempted to find a mutually-agreeable time for two eleven-year-old girls to meet with me, I discovered that there was only one two-hour slot in the entire week which was open for both of them. The loss of free time and unscheduled play has become a concern for paediatricians, who claim that "Whereas play protects children's emotional development, a loss of free time in combination with a hurried lifestyle can be a source of stress, anxiety and may even contribute to depression for many children" (AAP, 2006). When time is filled with such a relentless rush of activities, it is little wonder that children expect the same flurry at church.

Chronos time could also be observed more happily. In interesting and various ways, the children marked time in the church. For Jason, the week was punctuated joyfully by Sunday: *Okay, when I go there I feel all happy and excited. I get to go there only on Sunday* (Jason, age 9). Seven-year-old Shannon drew two very colourful pictures of a church as she would design it [see Figure 11]. The church included a steeple with a bell and as we looked at her drawings together, she explained:

Shannon: *This says, "If you're late for church, you'd better come.*

C. A.: *It reminds everyone to come?*

Shannon: *Yes.*

C. A.: *Everyone can hear it?*

Shannon: *Yes, it says, "It's time for church." Then the bell will ring.*

Although Shannon was the only child who explicitly ascribed a purpose to the church bell, a surprising number of children commented on church bells, and on their

appreciation of the sound. A number of them also included bells in the steeples of the churches in their drawings. In an age when the church bell no longer fills the community functions it did for centuries, I wonder if the ring of the bell is more than a musical sound for the children. Does it mark time for them, too? *It's time for church. You'd better come.*

Another instance of children's eagerness to mark time occurred during Children's Worship. On the wall of the children's worship centre in my home church hangs a church-year calendar wheel which demarcates the seasons of the church year and the individual units of each season. One of the opening rituals each Sunday is to move the pointer ahead to the appropriate unit – a ritual I often and embarrassingly forget when I am leading the session. Although I may forget, some of the children never forget, and will invariably remind me that *we have to move the calendar*. A number of reasons spring to mind for their keenness to change the calendar: the child's love of ritual, eagerness to participate in a meaningful action, "my turn" impulse, etc. However, is it possible that some of these children experience that action as a moment of kairos time intersecting chronos time? That even while it measures chronos time, it measures a moment outside of the ordinary time that marks their week?

In another very different setting – the Kairos Prison Marathon at a Nova Scotian institution – a banner hangs in the room in which the 24-hour group sessions take place. The design on the banner is simple: a circle with a tangent touching the circle at one point. The covenant all participants (volunteers and inmates) say together includes the statement, "Kairos is that special point in time when something deeply significant happens. It is a moment at once as elusive and as significant as that point at which the tangent touches the circle" (Kairos Group Covenant).

It was evident that children also experienced propitious moments of kairos time – subjective, existential moments in time.

> C. A.: *Are there any things about this room* [the sanctuary] *that you really like, things that are your favourite?*
>
> Caitlyn: *One of my favourite things is watching Paul when he is up there. I look at what he is wearing because he's usually wearing something different and usually there are flowers around and I admire them. They look really pretty, they look almost real, they're so pretty. Usually for a little while I stare at the windows and the things on the walls, and sometimes try to figure out what they mean because they don't have something to describe what they mean. So I try to figure it out.* (Caitlyn, age 9)

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi uses the term 'flow' for being in a state of oneness with the activity or situation at hand, or being fully in the present. Caitlyn, who conveys a sense of self-composure and tranquillity in church, seemed to demonstrate this state of focus which allows time to fall away. Csikszentmihalyi wrote:

> When we're in flow, whether playing the violin or climbing a mountain, our actions merge with our awareness. We stop being spectators of our own experience, which eliminates that ruminative self-consciousness that's such a burden. We feel a sense of oneness with something larger than the self, whether it's a musical tradition or nature or a deity. Because we're concentrating on the present, our activity dictates our experience of time rather than the clock. (quoted in Gallagher, 1994, p. 172)

Caitlyn often brings a sketch pad with her and draws as she sits and observes, contented to be in this space at this time, observing what goes on around her and allowing her mediations to emerge through her fingers onto the paper.

Martin (now in his sixties) recalled childhood memories of sitting in a little country church, staring out of the windows at the horse pasture beyond the church yard, and day-dreaming:

> *I do remember the people who lived just beyond the church. Their horses used to be out in the field. The cemetery was just out in the church yard; and just beyond that was a bit of a swamp area, and then a pasture. Their horses used to be out*

there. When I was younger, horses used to be a big thing for me. I had the thought that some day I wanted to be a cowboy... So when they were out in the pasture I could sit there and look out the window. Time seemed to pass by easier when I could fantasize about being out there with those horses.

At other times, his imagination took him in another direction:

I guess one of the things that always kind of captured my eyes and my imagination was the fact that the ceiling was so high, because I was accustomed to the house where the walls were normal and in the church the ceiling went up with the slope of the roof. There were no overlays, there were rafters. The ceiling went for – it seemed – it went forever so you could just imagine that if you had a rope fastened way up there and you could get up on the top of the windows and if you did it just right you could probably swing right through the church and out through the front door. Things like that I can remember imagining, even though the minister was speaking and my mother was either sitting in the row I was in or behind me. Fortunately, neither one of them were able to read minds or at least I didn't think they were! ... Well, I'm sure over the years, I probably did daydream about other things but it was – a lot of times my daydreaming was when I was looking out the window.

When the children with whom I work most regularly are provided enough chronos time, kairos moments are more likely to happen. One notable occasion occurred during Holy Week this past year (2007). On most Sunday mornings we are often pressed for time, trying to include each element that is prescribed for Young Children and Worship©. Because the children dislike missing any one of the elements, it means that their personal 'work time' is often truncated. This past Maundy Thursday, I offered a special session for the children while the adults participated in a Tenebrae service. We had a full unhurried hour, with the added atmosphere of soft lighting provided by floor lamps. The children were excited and in a state of anticipation about this unusual evening (and probably glad for an excuse to stay up later than usual!). They were especially attentive during the solemn story of Jesus' last meal with his friends. During their work time that evening, the children had ample time to respond to the story through their art work. A peaceful calm

settled over the room as each child settled down with his or her art supplies, and became absorbed in personal expression. Madeleine L'Engle (1998) writes,

> In kairos we are completely unselfconscious, and yet paradoxically far more real than we can ever be when we are constantly checking our watches for chronological time. The saint in contemplation, lost (discovered) to self in the mind of God is in kairos. The artist at work is in kairos.... In kairos we become what we are called to be as human beings, co-creators with God, touching on the wonder of creation. (p. 258)

That evening, the children experienced kairos time, absorbed in their work, "completely unselfconscious" and "touching on the wonder of creation."

Lived Space – Spatiality

My initial impetus for embarking on this research project was to explore how children experienced the physical attributes of the house of the church. In Langeveld's words (1984, p. 215), how do they experience the "thingness" of this place to which they come regularly, periodically or sporadically? I wanted to know if the things that are important to me might be important to children as well. Do the 'things' that speak to me of faith speak to children? Does it matter whether a church has its own "look" or whether it resembles an auditorium for performances? In fact, on several occasions I have presented conference round-table discussions entitled, "The altar or the projection screen?" How do children respond to the place and space of a church? Many of the children interviewed had strong ideas about what they appreciated aesthetically about their church, and what, in fact, constituted a "normal church."

In a general sense, the preceding discussion has encompassed the lifeworld of spatiality. Through human relationships (relationality), the physical senses (corporeality) and time (temporality), children experience the built environment as lived space. As van

Manen (1997) defined it, "lived space is the existential theme that refers us to the world or landscape in which human beings move and find themselves at home" (p. 102), or, to use scriptural language, the space in which "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28a).

Because lived space is a category that not only facilitates our inquiry into "the ways we experience the affairs of our day to day existence" but also to "uncover more fundamental meaning dimensions of lived life" (p. 103), I have chosen to narrow my focus in this section to those elements that appear to relate more overtly to religious meaning. How did children experience elements such as signs and symbols, light and dark, size and other aesthetic qualities of their church?

Beauty

As briefly noted earlier in the chapter (corporeality – sight), visual aspects were important. The churches that most of the interviewees attend are relatively plain and simply adorned, having been established by inheritors of the dissenting tradition of the Protestant church. Plain walls, a cross at the front of the church, a small pulpit hanging and stained glass windows would constitute the interiors of most of the church sanctuaries involved in this study; banners and flowers might add seasonal interest. Often, however, the interiors have rich natural wood finishes. The more ornate exceptions were a Church of Ireland and two Roman Catholic churches attended by adult interviewees.

Given these choices, it is perhaps not surprising that about one-third of the children interviewed claimed stained-glass windows as one of their favourite things about their church buildings. Introspective Caitlyn *usually look[ed] at the windows and*

look[ed] at the pictures on them, as did her seven-year-old sister, Kerri; Lisa (age 8) noticed most *the windows with all the pictures*; Dugald (age 11) also looked at the windows and the coloured glass while sitting in church; Nicholas (age 13) particularly noticed from his regular place in the balcony *the stained-glass windows – they're shiny – I sit right beside them.*

In a drawing of the church he would design, nine-year-old Jason included a stained-glass window. When asked for his response to the pictures of the two very colourful Danish church interiors he was most impressed by the vivid abstract stained-glass window: it was *very cool* and *awesome*. Nine-year-old Alleyn also thought that stained-glass windows should be included in the design of a church: *I like those in a church – there are some pictures of Jesus, the Good Shepherd* (relating to his own church). Hermione (age 6) liked the windows that were *like pictures* because they were *nice*. When asked what a church she would build would look like, ten-year-old Jenna replied, *It would probably have a lot of stained-glass windows. They are really colourful and let the light shine through them.*

The teenagers, too, spoke warmly about stained-glass windows. Amos (age 14) enthused about the windows he had seen in the European cathedrals, which *all told a story*, exclaiming that they were his favourite thing. In designing their own church, Nateasha (age 17), Nadine (age 15) and Felisha (age 18) all stated emphatically *definitely stained-glass windows*.

Adults recalled strong memories of pictorial windows contemplated at length. For Norma, growing up in a church she experienced as cold and dark, the windows provided welcome relief, *particularly if it was a sunny day – the colours streamed in.* Helena

would become absorbed in the windows (pictorial centre surrounded by panels of small, asymmetrical panes of glass), especially *with the border of irregular-shaped pieces of glass with tiny red triangles between them – I would count them.* Roderick vividly remembered the stained-glass chancel window which was installed in the large, urban church when he was about nine or ten, all the more impressive since he had never seen one before: *the colours and the pictures all became quite vivid... it's Jesus, the good shepherd, but all around it are vignettes of healing – the healing window they call it – so the healing of various people in the New Testament.*

While most of the churches with stained-glass windows had traditionally designed Victorian windows, one church had two large pictorial windows executed in a contemporary style. Style, however, appeared irrelevant to the children. The radiant colours and the stories the pictures told drew the attention of the children and pleased them. The disparaging comment by Giles about "the visual clutter and busyness of an interior overpowered by Victorian stained glass" (2004, p. 114) would presumably find no resonating echo among the children interviewed.

In a culture which has become predominately visually oriented, the pictorial exerts a powerful influence. Because children's eyes are inexorably drawn to these colourful windows, questions might be raised as to the educative and spiritual influence of stained-glass windows. It was outside the purview of this study to explore with the children how these literal representations shaped their understanding and faith development, but it was evident that the windows made deep impressions on young minds.

Size

How did the interviewees experience the size of the house of the church? As already noted, many of them spoke of church in ways that emphasised intimacy and cosiness – characteristics of smallness that related to personal relationships. In theological terms, I would suggest that, for the children, smallness spoke of the horizontal human relationships, as explored earlier in this chapter.

However, there was a quality of largeness, of generous size – of what Bachelard calls vastness – that appeared to evoke the numinous. I sensed this response from the two-year-old at the Maundy Service, from twelve-year-old Alicia and from seventeen-year-old Nateasha. Both the toddler's and Alicia's responses echoed Jules Vallès, who is quoted by Bachelard from Vallès' novel, *L'enfant,* "'Space has always reduced me to silence'" (quoted in Bachelard, 1994, p. 183).

In their lively discussion of the ideal church, these teenagers also focussed on size.

C. A.: *If you could design a church how would you want it to look?*

Nateasha: *You mean the layout? [Yeah] Well, I would probably have two floors – upper level and lower level and then I'd have the minister sitting higher than the lower level high up so everyone could see him. [Okay, yes] And the choir probably off to the side, behind the minister – or reverend.*

C. A.: *Any special things you like in the church?*

Nateasha: *Definitely stained glass windows. I think those are beautiful when people come and sit down.*

C. A.: *Can you think how you would like a church to be – besides smelling nice?*

Felisha: *Like Nateasha said, stained glass windows. Comfortable seating arrangements, so everyone can see. Like almost a theatre layout, like going down.*

Nadine: *I'd want it to be a big white building. That's what I think of when I think of churches. [Okay]. Stained glass windows.*

C. A.: *Big and white.*

Perry: *Just a whole lot of space.*

C. A. *A whole lot of space. Interesting. What kind of space. What's in that space?*

Perry: *Lots of seats.*

C. A.: [Talks about Giles' ideas.] *Giles says most churches are way too cluttered.*

Nateasha: *Yeah, when you go to a small church it's not the same effect on you as if you go to a big church and you walk into the big open rooms and the crosses and the pictures and that. It has a lot of effect on you.*

C. A.: *What kind of effect?*

Nateasha: *Like, when you walk into a cluttered church it's not really anything special but when you walk into a big church, you kind of feel the spirit, kind of thing.* (Nateasha, age 17; Nadine, age 15; Felisha, age 18; Perry, age 19)

These teenagers were unable (unwilling?) to describe in more detail what they meant by "feeling the spirit," although such a response to space lies at the heart of this inquiry.

Although the children could not describe its effect on them, a number of them mentioned the size of space within the church. Size, of course, is relative. To a five-year-old, even a small country church can be experienced as immense, as recalled by Martin (related in greater detail on p. 150):

Martin: *I guess one of the things that always kind of captured my eyes and my imagination was the fact that the ceiling was so high... those were things I can remember, always thinking that that ceiling was so high.*

Two children who attend relatively small churches responded, *I like it – it's big* (Alleya, age 9) and *Because it's a little bit bigger* (Jason, age 9). Dugald (age 11) enthused about the genuinely big churches he had visited in other parts of North America,

preferring the *really big ones.* Eight-year-old Lisa, however, approached size from a purely pragmatic interest: describing her church she opined, *It's more cramped, more people. It needs to be more spacious. Kids should have time and a table in the vestry, and adults another time and table – so kids can get the food they like.*

Willa, who grew up in an new A-frame church whose interior ceiling of redwood soared approximately sixty feet at the apex, recalls:

> *I remember sitting and staring around and looking at the pulpit hanging with its IHS in elaborate gold embroidery on burgundy velvet and wondering what it meant, looking up at the high ceiling (tall cathedral ceiling, A-frame), and at the wooden ribs that went up from the floor to the point of the ceiling. It felt so BIG.*

Much has been written about the spiritual qualities of vast spaces, especially vertical height, often in reference to the Gothic masterpieces. Inge quotes P. T. Forsyth who said that the Gothic church "was thrust like a fine question heavenward" and that the total effect of its design and construction "was to make the spirit travel upwards with the eye and lose itself in the infinity of space" (quoted in Inge, 2003, p. 118). Alicia's experience of the Senlis Cathedral, noted earlier, reflected this effect: *it was SO QUIET, so nice, so big – God was everywhere.*

Recent research in the field of marketing presents an intriguing corollary on the effect of ceiling height on the way in which a person feels, thinks and acts. Through a rigorously designed and controlled study, Meyers-Levy and Zhu (2007) concluded, "When a person is in a space with a 10-foot ceiling, they will tend to think more freely, more abstractly. They might process more abstract connections between objects in a room, whereas a person in a room with an 8-foot ceiling will be more likely to focus on specifics." The researchers also theorized that when reasonably salient (that is, when people are cognizant of their surroundings, including ceiling height, and are not

preoccupied with proximate matters), a higher ceiling can stimulate the concept of freedom, while a lower ceiling can stimulate the concept of confinement.

Do we need both – the intimate spaces that nourish our human relationships and the vast spaces that lift our hearts and spirits toward the Divine? Bachelard (1994) wrote, "we all have our cottage moments and our palace moments. We descend to living close to the ground, on the floor of a cottage, then would like to dominate the entire horizon from a castle in Spain" (p. 62). Bachelard made the seemingly paradoxical observation that in Baudelaire's poetics, "the word *vast* evokes calm, peace and serenity. It expresses a vital, intimate conviction" (196). Poetically, he framed the question which has preoccupied me for some time, "How much of the world must one retain in order to be accessible to transcendency" (p. 181)?

Figure 4. Interior of Senlis Cathedral, France. Electronically retrieved from http://ica.princeton.edu/langland/viewrecord.php

Light

The theme of light, which is an important thread throughout Christian tradition (as in many other world religions), emerged in an ambiguous fashion through the interviews. Few of the young children interviewed specifically noted the presence or absence of light, although a good number mentioned windows, as discussed earlier; for instance, Jenna (age 10) would design a church with *a lot of stained-glass windows* because *they are really colourful and let the light shine through them.* Lisa (age 8) though, who attends a ninety-five year-old church with a rich, natural dark-wood interior, said firmly *I prefer lighter and brighter.* Adults, on the other hand, spoke eloquently and emotionally about their experiences of light or darkness in childhood.

The following is taken from notes by a prison chaplain of a moving interview with an inmate in a medium security prison; he recalled his experiences as an altar boy in a Roman Catholic church in urban Nova Scotia:

> *The basement was dark and scary and used for storage; it wasn't arranged like it was upstairs. It didn't have the godly things like upstairs. Upstairs was filled with sunlight; when the light came in, you just felt that God was right there with you.* (Denys, age 35)

In striking contrast to a positive experience of light were children's experiences of dark and dingy quarters encountered in church buildings. As I've shared my research interest informally with others, a surprising number of adults have echoed the stories of people formally interviewed for this study. The following are representative:

> *The room as I remember it* [where he had his Sunday School class as a very young child] *was kind of triangular as it was in a corner where two old buildings met. It was poorly lighted (a light bulb hanging from a cord), damp and the wall may have leaked a little too. The pump for the well and the tank which would sweat in the summer were all exposed to us kids. I guess we just stayed away from*

them out of fear and maybe a little good sense. The walls were concrete block, unpainted. The odd spider lived in this multipurpose room. If I remember rightly there was a mouse-trap behind the pump. I was 3 1/2 years younger than my next older brother. He and his peers used this dark den of a pump room to gather for what they called "the angel club". These were 10-12 year old boys who were looking for something to do during choir practice. I was only allowed to visit the club when it was not in session. They had secret handshakes and stuff but I was too young to attend. Eventually I became an honorary member before they out-grew this phase. (Clive, age 40s, son of a pastor, now himself a pastor, written reminiscence)

My first Sunday School room was actually the furnace room... That's when I first started school. I don't remember that they had like preschool classes like they do today. There were only 5 or 6 of us in the class. So the furnace room was a very large room, but so was the furnace. We had a small table that we sat at and the teacher had an ordinary sized wooden chair that she sat at the end of the table and talked to us. [C. A.: What was the room like, was it dark?] I don't so much remember, it was more the people and the things that we did. We knew it was the furnace room, and the furnace was there. To some of us, that was a novelty because at our homes we had wood burning or coal burning stoves. We didn't have these great big furnaces. We didn't think about that much really and then we came out of there to what was the main auditorium, a large room in the basement like where they have receptions. (Martin, recalling years 5-6)

Reiterating Denys' associations: *The basement was dark and scary and used for storage; it wasn't arranged like it was upstairs. It didn't have the godly things like upstairs.*

Many adults I asked about their early memories of church, recalled a Sunday School class held in a furnace room, boiler room, pump room, or other totally utilitarian mechanical room. No adult whom I have interviewed has ever held an adult class in such a space. Although these adults seemed to take their learning space for granted **as children** and did not question or protest spending time in such dismal spaces, I wonder how it shaped their concept of church, their emerging sense of their own place within the household of the church and their notion of God and their relationship to God – all questions which warrant further research. I contrast their curiosity about what lay in the

darkness behind the behemoth of a furnace (a material concept) to Alicia's immediate response of awe upon stepping into a Gothic cathedral.

Other children simply explored the nether regions of the churches they attended, fortunate not to be trapped in dungeon-like rooms for educational purposes.

> *We moved to [the city] when I was four and we attended _____ [Baptist Church]. .... I do remember the building before they remodelled in maybe 1970, so I basically remember that building before they remodelled it ... I was probably eight when they remodelled the building. So – um, I used to go and play there when Dad played volleyball so I got to go places other than on a Sunday morning. ... It was a strange building – that part was probably built in the twenties. So it was weird cause there were no other buildings like it, big heavy woodwork, big heavy arched doors, they had these walls that came down that were like a roll-top desk – that divided off some of these rooms, and the library – and you could shove this up into the ceiling. But – I mean –I knew of nothing else like that– no other building I was in was like that. Parts of it were a little scary because there were big rooms and not many people. And strange – there were strange passageways between the sanctuary.... Little places you didn't go. Strange rooms off – there were corners – a pastor's study that hadn't been a pastor's study for years between the sanctuary and the vestry and it was a strange room – it had an outside door, but it was never used for much of anything. There were lots of strange places.* (Gerard, age 40s)

Other adults recalled strong emotional responses to the areas of the church they inhabited. Roderick contrasted his experience of two of the churches of his childhood:

> *My image of the church was of dark, dark wood. That's what I remember, but it may now not seem so dark, but as a child, dark wood pews, dark wood walls with wainscoting and then plaster on the upper half. There were some vestry-like Sunday School rooms, and they again had dark wood, and they were perpendicular board, grooves put in, and really dark, dark brown or stained wood. So that's basically all that I remember of that.* (experience of church at age 3-4)

> *At ____ Baptist there are many levels. Right down at the bottom was a room, it's still there, where we had Mission Band. It was painted yellow, and had big windows. It was down toward the parking lot. It had big windows. That's what I remember about that church – light, sort of light pastel walls, the colour I most remember is yellow. One room might have been pastel pink. It was bright and cheery, and that was a new revelation to me. To me, up until then, a church was dark and dreary and horrible and remote, because you couldn't see over the heads of people. I was irrelevant. I was just there because I was their child. But*

> *when I went into that building it was a whole new change. for me* (memory of church at age 7)

The human attitude to light in northern latitudes is birthed in the distant agrarian past, and is linked to the experience of time. Northern peoples developed a cyclical sense of time, marked by recurring solstice festivals, (still observed in festivals such as Christmas and Hanukkah) which brought light into the cold, dark winter and celebrated the sun's return. Light in such an environment would have signified life and survival, reified by the return of the growing season and kinder climatic conditions. Light also illuminated and protected against danger of many kinds. In such conditions, the physical qualities of light were translated into spiritual qualities, as well. The revolutionary discovery of the flying buttress in construction during the Middle Ages permitted immensely tall structures that could sustain huge expanses of windows, flooding the interiors with light.

On a more moderate scale, the Shakers (an eighteenth-century splinter group of the Quakers) constructed habitations for themselves and their animals that were filled with light, air and space.

> Their most prescient legacy… might be the illumination of interior environments, which they felt could give the earthbound a taste of heaven. 'Good and evil are typified by light and darkness,' wrote Shaker eldress Aurelia Mace. 'Therefore, if we bring light into a dark room, the darkness disappears, and inasmuch as a soul is filled with good, evil will disappear.' (Gallagher, 1994, p. 46)

A visitor described Shaker buildings as 'a combination of space, beauty, symmetry, and the light and splendor of a summer's day.' Extra-large windows were installed, including interior windows that 'borrowed' light from adjacent rooms for central hallways.

> On entering a Shaker meeting hall, brilliantly lit, painted white and trimmed with heavenly blue, the painter Charles Sheeler noted that 'instinctively one takes a deep breath, as in the midst of some moving and exalted association with nature.

> There were no dark corners in those lives. Their religion thrived on light, in their crafts and equally with their architecture.' (p. 47)

Two couplets from a poem by Paul Scheebart, written in 1914 in honour of Bruno Taut's expressionist Glass House, give poetic expression to this human attitude to light:

> Light seeks to penetrate the whole cosmos
> And is alive in crystal.
>
> Colored glass
> Destroys hatred. (Bletter, 1981, p. 21)

The German Expressionists were particularly fascinated by crystal-glass symbolism as a metaphor of transformation to signify a changed society. Bruno Taut's iconic Glass House (built in 1914 for an exhibition in Cologne) was perhaps the most idiosyncratic representation of this ideal, which drew its crystal imagery from interwoven Jewish, Arabic and Christian traditions dating back to Solomonic times (Bletter, 1981). The characteristics of crystal-glass' transparency and light developed into the concept of an architecture of spiritual salvation and transcendence that found one of its most outstanding expressions in the Gothic cathedral, both in light and in stained glass (Bletter, 1981; Olsson, 2004). "The true function of stained glass was within the scope of a mystical, transcendent light: a light that illuminates the soul of the worshipper" (Bletter, p. 27). Perhaps the most overt representation of this intentional association of physical light and spiritual light in contemporary times is the monumental Crystal Cathedral, designed by Philip Johnson and John Burgee for the Reverend Dr. Robert Schuller.

Although most children did not articulate their responses to light or darkness, I remain curious about their experience of it. The fact that adults recalled strong responses to light only offers teasing clues to its significance. The question for me remains: what is

the experiential resonance of this universal quality of space? I offer the following observations and reflections.

Sometimes these memories were part of a more complex emotional response associated with relationships. For instance, Norma's memories of a cold, dark church were associated with a cold, distant clergyman who seemingly offered little warmth or welcome to small children. Norma went on to contrast her experiences in her home, urban church with the country church in southern Ireland she visited regularly in the summer.

> *I'll tell you about my experiences in another church, because we used to go and stay with relatives of ours in _____ which is in Southern Ireland.... We stayed with relatives who farmed... We went to a church in a little village _____. In Southern Ireland we were the minority there, cause obviously most of Southern Ireland is Roman Catholic. So when we would go to visit – especially there were more of us – we would rather swell the congregation. In_____ the church we would go to was a very simple church – it was Church of Ireland cause my relatives in County _____ were Church of Ireland as well. It was a very simple wooden church;, it had the same window shape but no stained glass. Very, very light and bright. It was a rectangular church, and again it had a centre aisle with pews on either side. It wouldn't probably have held more than a hundred people – maximum, maximum. The organ took up upper right hand corner. But it had a passageway past it to the back where they would store things. There were no separate rooms to the church. To the left of where the organ was, was just a very simple dais with the altar and the wooden lectern. No steps, you just stepped up. The organ was one of those that used bellows -- a pump organ. One of my relatives, she played the organ and there was another lady used to sit on a stool beside her and she would pump the bellows. And every now and then because the organ was so old – of course, they didn't have the money for the upkeep – the keys would stick. And my aunt would keep on singing, lift the keys, give them a good shake and keep on playing. [Laughter] it was very intriguing. And especially – she had a very high voice, and it was just the fact that she carried on singing – with a shake. So the organ intrigued me – you could actually see it and how it worked. In the church in* [the city], *the organ was part and parcel of the part that was at the top – part of the grand choir – it had the choir on both sides..... Again, the difference – there were so many differences – this church was smaller, we knew everybody, there were very few families that were Protestant. It was lighter, it was brighter. The service wasn't as long. the minister was a lot friendlier – and younger – that helped. He always made us very welcome – again, I suppose because it was such a small congregation, you certainly couldn't get away with*

being invisible. Again, it was a church where, as a youngster, if you were chitter-chattering, that was fine. They were glad to have you. There wasn't the same sternness – that they had in the other one. There was no Sunday School.

Norma's memories of this church, with its light, bright space afforded by the clear windows [Richard Giles would approve!], are associated with warmth, welcome and friendliness. The intimacy of a small place associated with family and familiar faces, a relaxed atmosphere, a comfortable space for children, were all part of her affective experience. *Lighter. Brighter.* The times spent in this place every summer with cousins, aunts and uncles, are imbued with a halo of light in Norma's memory.

In general, when adults remembered dark spaces from childhood experiences in church, it was in references to dingy, unpleasant rooms, frightening places or forbidding. As I contemplate these negative associations, I am reminded of my experience with children on a Maundy Thursday evening. On that occasion, I observed a calm and peaceful ambiance that seemed to have been at least partially created by dim lighting. The softer (darker) lighting appeared to settle the children and allow them to become more introspective. In that instance, did the soft glow of the lamps provide a defined light source, that – coupled with a richly-appointed space and loving adults – welcomed the children much like a beacon from a lighthouse on a dark night?

Sign, Symbol, Image

When I asked five-year-old Adrienne to tell me about the church she was drawing for me, she explained patiently, *Well, it's a church – it's a normal church.* When I gently pressed her, "What's a normal church?" she responded, *It's just a church.*

As Ivy described to me the simple country church she attended as a little girl, she claimed, *It definitely had an atmosphere of a church.*

When nine-year-old Caitlyn inspected the pictures of the two Danish churches redecorated in a bright, multi-coloured style, she averred, *This one is so colourful it almost looks like a playground. So if I were to look at that I wouldn't see a church, I would see a children's day care.* She confidently asserted that the church she attended looked more like a church.

To access children's experiences in a non-verbal manner, I invited them to draw a church as they would like it to look. Depending on their age, I would use terms and expressions such as "If you were the architect" "If you could build it just like you would like it to look" "If you had all the money you needed to build any church" and similar variations. To my surprise, all the children, with one notable exception, drew pictures of the church they attended. Some of these drawings have been included here. When invited to tell me more about their designs, they invariably assured me that that was how they wanted a church to look. Only one child, an extraverted, imaginative seven-year-old, drew a church that closely resembled a fairground and which she described to me in colourful, wildly imaginative terms. Her mother, who is a clergyperson, commented with a laugh, "I guess we need to think about celebration a little more!"

This delightful exception notwithstanding, what signifies a church to these children? What speaks to them about faith? In a culture and in a faith tradition which is seeing new churches erected that closely resemble auditoriums, this question is a highly pertinent one for me.

The architectural writer and teacher, Christian Norberg-Schulz clarifies the meanings of sign, symbol and image, all of which are of profound importance to this discussion. "While a sign has an indicative function, and a symbol functions through

substitution, an image is something that is both new and rather peculiar. It represents nothing other than itself, but as Gadamer nicely puts it, it assembles a world and thus goes beyond its component elements" (2000, p. 11). Another approach is Oliver Quick's distinctions between material objects that can be thought of as "instruments whose character is defined by what is done with them, or symbols whose character is defined by what is known by them" (quoted in Inge, 2003, p. 65). How do children experience the signs, symbols and images they encounter in the house of the church? Or perhaps, more appropriately, what signs, symbols and images of the church do children construct?

In the context of this study, most of the churches attended by the interviewees are in a faith tradition that eschews excessive ornamentation – ecclesial or otherwise. All churches would have a cross prominently displayed, usually at the front of the church behind the pulpit. Stained glass windows are most likely to be pictorial representations of the life of Jesus, often of a Victorian style, with few traditional Christian symbols. A Communion table would in most cases occupy a central spot, in front of the pulpit.

In contraposition, I have included two interviews with people who recalled their childhood experiences in Roman Catholic churches. One drifted away from the institutional church, pulled away by strong family influences but still deeply spiritual, while the other eventually joined the Baptist church of the community in which she married and raised her family. I hope these intensely recalled experiences may contribute to the discussion.

> *As a young boy, he attended _____ Catholic church in* [Maritime city]. *His earliest and strongest memories are of being an altar boy at the age of twelve. You had to walk and conduct yourself a very certain way with no running or being loud, and dress neatly in your Sunday best – he liked the exactness and difference of it; it wasn't everyday stuff. When he became an altar boy, then he also got to go out back and dress in special clothes and to carry different things in*

the procession; he also got to sit up front and then he felt different because he felt more important.

He remembers the church as being big and beautiful – stained glass windows, beautiful wood, interesting where the ceiling met the walls, massive steps leading up the front of the church and big wooden doors. He ***never*** *got tired or bored of looking around at the insides of the church – it was so* ***beautiful*** *– the arches, the seats, mahogany and gold, the organ pipes. Everything was so* ***beautiful****.*

He always felt safe when he was with someone at the church.

He liked learning the Stations of the Cross. You could learn about God by looking at things around you.

The basement was dark and scary and used for storage; it wasn't arranged like it was upstairs. It didn't have the godly things like upstairs. Upstairs was filled with sunlight; when the light came in, you just felt that God was right there with you. (Denys, age 35, from notes taken of interview by a prison chaplain, his emphasis)

When I got to grade school, I went to St. ____ School in [Maritime city] *and every Friday afternoon we were walked down to St. _____ Church for an afternoon service. And, I guess, just coming upon the church, your whole attitude changed. It was one of worship, just to see the church... You – you – you – felt quieter, nearly as if everyone stopped talking, as you came close to the church. There was a – a – a feeling, a feeling that you were coming closer to God, because we believed that* ***God was in that church****. They always had a large red glass with a light inside it, that was always lit. We were told that that was never put out, that particular light, and that was a sign that God was in that church, because He was the light of the world. And I think the nuns would shish us as we came close to the church. And of course as you went in, there was a wonderful ambiance. You started by putting your fingers in holy water as you arrived, and you crossed yourself, and that was symbolic of, we were told, that at one time you bathed yourself before you entered the church, also that we had been baptized into the church. Then you walked in and as you went to your pew, you genuflected, which again was "Hello to God. I'm here, and I've come to worship you." So there was all kinds of symbolism, which, I think, brought us* ***very close*** *to the feeling that God was present. So those are my earliest recollections. And then of course, we went to church every single Sunday... every time I passed a church I would do the sign of the cross on the forehead, my mouth and my heart. He was in my mind, I spoke of Him and He was in my heart. That was automatic when you saw a steeple with a cross on the top – that you did that. So, so, so therefore, the actual church* ***itself*** *had* ***great*** *meaning to me, and I think probably that for a while I thought that was the only place that God was. I went beyond that, but I think at first that's where God was. You had to go to church on Sunday because you had to be with God on Sunday. As you entered the church, ah, you looked up that long*

aisle, and of course in the Catholic church, the altar was there. And for church all the candles were always lit, and so there was – there was just – to me – a real feeling – of peace. When I was really down as a teenager, or something just through the day, I would drop in to church, just to kneel and pray. You had all those little lights up front – the acolytes up front, all different colours. They were always lit and you could light a candle. And I think just the flickering of the candles and the quietness, just ***total quietness*** *in the church. We didn't talk before, before the Mass. You prayed before the Mass. So you walked out of this secular world into a* ***completely*** *different world, when you walked into church. And – and – it didn't matter, I think, so much whether there were large pillars like there were at _____ Basilica. Like if you walked into there you were just in awe, because the ceilings were so high and everything. But you could go into a small Catholic church and still have the same feeling because it was set up the same way. You walked up an aisle. The altar was there. The candle was lit that you always looked towards. In those days too, we had lots of -- lots of statues, and still today, they have the Stations of the Cross. The Stations of the Cross were something that I did every time that I went on my own to church. And the doors were always open. You could go in anytime that you wanted to. As I say, the lights flickering, the quietness, and the Stations of the Cross go down one side of the church, then up the other side of the church. To me they told the whole story of Jesus and at that point I really liked the crucifixion itself – the fact that Jesus was on the cross. Because I would meditate on that, what he did for me, and – and some of them were really cruel looking with a lot of blood, and that kind of thing. But it didn't disturb me at all, no, I guess because we saw it all the time. The nuns wore it on their beads that they wore. We had rosaries that had the crucifix on it, and these kinds of things. Every Good Friday, when I was a teenager, three of us would go and walk from church to church and we would do up to seven Catholic churches. As a teenager and we would walk, and you would go in and the crucifix was usually – one of them was usually laid out on a pillow and you'd go up and pray before the crucifix. You could touch it, and then you'd go back to your seat, and then we'd go on to another church. We did that every Good Friday... I just went [to the convent school] for Grade 11 so that would be age 16, 11 and 12, and that was amazing because that was a little tiny chapel with a most* ***beautiful*** *ornate altar. The work, it just came up into cathedrals up at the top and it all appeared to be white ivory. I know it was just stucco, but it was so creamy. It was just* ***beautiful****, and of course, in the Catholic church too, there are the vestments and the altar cloths and everything –that are all done in a satin – it was a shiny* ***beautiful*** *material, beautifully embroidered and that kind of thing. So, so, again, the candles, the statues, Stations of the Cross, the kneeling benches. I miss a kneeling bench, I like to kneel. As you came closer to the altar, you just felt closer and closer to God. And I was a person who did sit up front. I think I really wanted to see what was going on. I really wanted to participate in it. And of course we had the altar rail and the confessionals. The confessionals were a part – again from school, before the first Friday of the month we were always taken down to church, each grade had to go down and we all had to go to Confession... Yes, [I came to know God] at a very young, very young age. I* ***really*** *felt close to Him,*

but I felt ***close to Him in church****. I mean, I said my prayers at night and that, but if I needed Him I felt I had to be in church to really talk to Him.* (Isabelle, 60s, her emphasis)

These two churches contained overt signs and symbols, which directed the worshipper to contemplation of the Divine in general, and to the tradition's interpretation in particular. The Stations of the Cross and the crucifixes (literal representations of the passion of Jesus) are strong signifiers of the suffering of Jesus on behalf of humankind, emphasising the individual's response and responsibility to that action. Objects prominently placed and integral to any Roman Catholic church – the confessional booth, statuary, votive candles, kneelers – overtly remind the believer to engage in religious acts in a specified way – to confess, to pray, etc. Other objects such as the stoup of holy water, baptismal font, sanctuary lamp, tabernacle, etc. act as symbols of particular beliefs, inviting believers to reflect on their spiritual significance and implication.

The signs and symbols may work on both a profound level (evoking spiritual awareness) and a mundane level (where to go, what is important, how the building is to be used). Symbols, according to Paul Ricoeur, " give rise to thought, they exercise our symbolic faculties, they arouse and focus our attention – and attention, it has been said, is the natural prayer of the soul" (quoted in Biles, 2007). As the young altar boy felt, *You could learn about God by looking at things around you.* The two instances cited would be a validation of architect Rybczyski's view that signs need to be understood to be valid, for buildings can carry complex messages. "Hence the lukewarm response that many modern buildings receive from the public, which literally does not 'understand' them" (1989, p. 163).

Just as these two Roman Catholic children read the signs and symbols of their churches and responded to them, so the children who drew their own churches for me,

when asked to draw their ideal church, were reflecting what they experienced as 'church.' Rybczyski stated, in this regard, "People expect buildings not only to function, to be structurally solid, and to fit into their surroundings but also to conform to what is proper and fitting" (p. 153). To the children interviewed, what was "proper and fitting" for a church was generally what they inhabited. Hence, Caitlyn's contention that the brightly-decorated Danish churches looked like a children's day care instead of a real church. Von Bonsdorff (2005) lends credence to this viewpoint when she asserted that habitability is relative to the function of spaces, and noted, "The joyful character of a children's day care centre adds to its aesthetic value but would be inappropriate in a chapel" (p. 118). It must be acknowledged that many children responded enthusiastically (verbally) to the bright Danish colours but, nevertheless, did not incorporate these 'unchurchy' colours into their artwork.

Aesthetics

Simply defined, aesthetic means "sensitive to beauty" (Rybczynski, 1989, p. 4). As has been so clearly demonstrated, children are indeed sensitive to beauty. My intention was neither to define the qualities of beauty in the manner of Alexander's "alphabet" of beauty (CBC, 2003b; see above p. 44) nor to formulate a theory of aesthetics but to explore how children experienced beauty. Von Bonsdorff (2005) noted that "an important kind of aesthetic value can best be discussed not in terms of contemplation or even appreciation, but in terms of enjoyment" (p. 119). What did the children enjoy?

The strongest appreciation was expressed for stained-glass windows, usually described as pretty and beautiful. Children appeared to enjoy their colours and the stories

they depicted, although abstract patterns were appreciated as well. Children expressed their aesthetic sensibilities when asked to design or draw a church as they would like it to look. Colour was important, as reflected by these comments: *I would like a little more colour* (Lisa, age 8). *A church should have a lot of colours* (Jason, age 9). *The church would have... nice colours on the walls* (Todd, age 15). One of the strongest responses came from the adult who recalled his childhood impressions of the Roman Catholic church he attended:

> *I remember the church as being big and beautiful – stained glass windows, beautiful wood.... I* ***never*** *got tired or bored of looking around at the insides of the church – it was so* ***beautiful*** *– the arches, the seats, mahogany and gold, the organ pipes. Everything was so* ***beautiful****.* (Denys, age 35)

The phrase *it was so beautiful* was repeated several times with great feeling.

For other children, aesthetics were expressed in imprecise terms. Alleyn (age 9) for instance, wanted a church to look *comforting and nice so people would like it and stuff and organised, I guess – I wouldn't want it dirty.* Other children also used the word *nice*, as well as *comfy*. The paucity of comments relating to specific items or designs of beauty can be attributed, I believe, to the relative simplicity of the churches which most of the children attend. Their appreciation of the stained-glass windows (irrespective of quality or design) speaks of their eye for the aesthetic, something which many of the adults in these churches would consider as irrelevant or secondary to functionalism in church design.

Von Bonsdorff (2005) wrote cogently of the aesthetics of habitability, asking the question, "What kinds of elements make us, then, experience a place as nice, welcoming, even beautiful?" (p. 114). She stated, "Interpreted as beautiful functionality, habitability is related to ideals of harmony and smoothness, to minimizing aesthetic obstacles such as,

for example, colours, sounds or smells that offend our senses" (115). Von Bonsdorff claimed that aesthetic value as applied to habitability is related to the function of spaces and, as such, is best described (experienced) in terms of enjoyment rather than contemplation or even appreciation (p. 119). In lieu of more overt visual components of beauty, I would suggest that the children I interviewed tended to view aesthetics in terms of habitability, as reflected by many of the experiences related to the lifeworld of corporeality. The architectural theorist, Norberg-Schulz (2000) also supported the thesis that the functional is beautiful "when by 'beautiful' we mean a vital and concrete form of expression". He wrote of "the fracture between thought and feeling' that sinks its roots as far back as Descartes" (p. 7). This fracture has tended to limit thought to the field of the quantifiable, while reducing the scope of emotion to the areas of taste or subjective enjoyment. A "truly functional artwork [which he claims architecture is] cannot fail to satisfy our feelings as well" (p. 7). These facets of habitability – a place where one was comfy, with good lighting and pleasing colours – seemingly created an aesthetically pleasing environment for these children. In light of the fervent response of the young Roman Catholic altar boy to the beauty of the architectural setting of his church and the association of that beauty with God, I wonder if there is something missing from an environment that is just *nice*.

Reflections on Webber-Barrie Rubric

Using the Webber-Barrie rubric on worship space developed in Chapter III, I would like to explore how the children's experiences intersect with the suggested criteria. Webber posits that one of the principles for a Christian worship space is that it should convey **hospitality, congeniality and warmth.** Although this principle is second in

Webber's list, it is the one that relates most strongly to the children's expressions. Barrie argued that sacred architecture conveys meaning overtly through visual representation (either pictorially or symbolically) and at a deeper, abstract level through form, and that it acts as a stage for the enactment of the rituals and ceremonies that convey meaning at both a pragmatic and symbolic level. How, I wonder, do the churches that these children inhabit embody hospitality, congeniality and warmth in terms of the children's experiences?

At an overt level, the churches attended by most of the interviewees facilitate interpersonal interactions that are warm and hospitable. For the most part, these churches are of a size that allows people to see and recognise each other across the room. Five-year-old Ella can easily find her friend on the other side of the sanctuary; it's important to ten-year-old Jenna that *There are a lot of people you recognise when you come in and everyone recognises you*; eleven-year-old Jill says *I like it a lot, it's small and we know everyone.... I like it when my family and friends are here.*

The churches experienced by the interviewees also provide recreational space for children to enjoy spontaneous play time with friends. This space may be as overt as a gym or as inconspicuous as open common spaces in halls or meeting rooms: nine-year-old Jason likes his church because *it has a gym so you can run around and all that stuff* and eleven-year-old Gavin likes to play basketball with a teenage friend (he emphasises that his friend is a teenager) when there's a break between church and Sunday School; eight-year-old Lisa believes that a special place for children is downstairs where *there's a place to hang up your coats and a big space where we run around and play tag.*

At an abstract level, the churches included in this study were of a scale that facilitated children's relationships in other ways. For instance, a number of the children mentioned that they liked the pastor, and they liked to watch the pastor during service. All of the children interviewed go to the front of the church for a special time with the pastor before leaving for their own programs or worship.

During my observations of the children, it was obvious that they were relaxed and comfortable, sitting in the front pew, on the floor or on the steps to the platform. Lisa explained to me, *We go to the front. Pastor Brent usually tells the story, or there might be people who are going away, or people who are joining the church, or a story when Pastor Brent was younger, or we talk about the song we sang.*

Seven-year-old Janey, whose mother is the pastor of the church Janey attends, thinks that church is cool because *My Mom has a children's story and we sing songs and we go to Sunday School.* Although six-year-old Hermione thinks that *when Paul* [the pastor] *talks, it gets a little boring*, she is philosophical about it, *Yeah, I just sit there for a little while.* Even though most of the children did not articulate their feelings about this particular space in the church, I wonder if it conveyed, at a deeper, unconscious level, a sense of their place within the worshipping community and within worship itself?

Finally, in regard to Barrie's argument that sacred architecture acts as a stage for the rituals and ceremonies that convey meaning at both a pragmatic and symbolic level, I would like to consider how children might experience the house of the church as a "stage" on which are enacted the rituals and ceremonies that convey the meaning of personal relationships in both pragmatic and symbolic modes.

Webber's principle of **participation** appeared to be experienced by the children. In terms of overt representation, all of the contemporary churches had specific places allocated for children's use. When I asked the question, "Do you think there should be special places for children in the church?" almost all of the children responded affirmatively, based on their experiences in the churches where this was so. Thirteen-year-old Logan replied *My favourite place in the church is the Youth Room; it has a TV, chairs, curtains. I like it.* Gavin (age 11) and Cassie (age 9) also appreciated their Sunday School rooms and the recreational centre where they enjoyed a variety of activities including sports, games, concerts and play. Such comments were representative. Six-year-old Hermione said:

> *I like going where my Mom teaches, but sometimes I like going where the little kids go.* [C. A.: *Like in the nursery? What do you like about that room?*] *Because we get to draw there and write.*

Dedicated spaces for children's activities were not always present in the little, rural churches remembered by the adults from their childhood – many of which were one-room structures. However, even in these cases some of the adults recalled special places in the church assigned to children for their activities. Karen recalled:

> *Sunday School was held in the church before the worship service and all classes were held in the sanctuary, with specific spaces allotted to each group: little ones at the back, behind the organ at the front of the church for the older children, then up to the balcony for the teens. It was exciting to be promoted to the class that met behind the organ, where they sat in two rows; it was sort of a private and special place. They would listen to the lesson and then colour the accompanying pages by kneeling on the floor and using the pew as a table.*

At an abstract level, it was difficult to gauge children's experiences of participation. All of the churches represented by the children interviewed had special times early in the service especially for children. Few children mentioned this aspect of

their participation in worship. One exception was five-year-old Susie who explained to me that her church had special places for children downstairs, but that there was also a space for children upstairs (in the sanctuary) too:

> *You don't play there, but our parents are there and they actually see us walking up and down, and sometimes I draw on a piece of paper.* [Materials are provided for children to use during the service.] *When I go downstairs, it's fun.... The banner carriers. They hold a cloth or a flag – I forget what it's called – when we go upstairs we actually hold it....* ***Everybody does.*** (her emphasis)

Susie, I would suggest, experienced participation in her church both overtly (personal banners for each child to carry to their own worship time) and subconsciously (a time when parents can observe the children purposively participating – *walking up and down*). Her church is providing Susie with visual signs of participation as well as a place for participation that operates at a deeper, unconscious level. Seven-year-old Janey's experience (mentioned above on page 176) provides another example.

Barrie asks, "To what end does the building act as a stage for the liturgies and celebrations which speak to a people's beliefs?" In reference to participation, Dugald shared his enjoyment of *singing in the Worship Band.* Eleven-year-old Dugald participates along with other adults in leading the singing in his church. He is experiencing the church as a stage on which children have an active role in the liturgies of the church. This past year, I coached two girls (ages 10 and 11) in signing (American sign and mime) an accompaniment to a worship song. One of the girls is usually quite shy in public but joined by her close friend had no hesitation in performing in front of the congregation. For both girls, this public act of worship leadership was a strong, positive experience, and reinforced the importance of allowing the house of the church to provide children with a stage for visible participation.

I now turn to Webber's first principle of worship space – it should convey the **mystery** of God's transcendence and immanence. Judging by the children's expressed experiences, I would suggest that the houses of the church which these children attended did not appear to convey God's transcendence in a meaningful way, either overtly or at a deeper unconscious level. Their relatively small, intimate spaces appeared to convey God's immanence to some of the children. Jason (age 9) claimed *There's all kind of love.* And Alleyn (age 9) stated *Well, I feel like cosy and happy. I'm also surrounded by God.* Five-year-old Susie was adamant about church: *It's about God, and God was doing stuff for us.* Ten-year-old Tessa stated *Well, I feel close to God when I'm in the sanctuary, and at the church when I'm praying and worshipping him. I also feel close to God when I'm at home doing my devotions and praying and reading the Bible.* For eight-year-old Addison, the sanctuary was associated with God, while her room downstairs was a respite from the work of worshipping: *Upstairs ... [is] mostly for singing. Downstairs is just where the kids go, to have a break from standing up and singing and sitting down.* These children appeared to be comfortable with God's presence surrounding them in a warm, cosy way. Their experience was markedly different from that of twelve-year-old Alicia, who had such a profound experience as she stepped into the Gothic cathedral of Senlis: *It was so quiet, so nice, so big – God was everywhere.*

The apparent lack of a sense of the mystery of God among most of the children whom I interviewed remains a concern for me. As discussed in Chapter IV, Hay and Nye (1998), and others, have emphasised that one of the marks of spirituality is 'mystery sensing,' including wonder and awe. I did not note such a sense in the children's interviews or in my observations of them. This absence stood in marked contrast to the

experiences of two adults from Roman Catholic childhoods, Isabelle and Denys, whose memories were recounted in some detail earlier in this chapter. The overt representation of the faith tradition combined with the symbols to create an ambience which spoke powerfully to these two young people. I wonder if perhaps I have not been astute enough in my observations, or if it is an impoverishment in the sacred architecture of the tradition in my study that contributes to this lack of a sense of transcendence? It remains an area of research I would like to explore further.

The final principle I address in regard to children's experiences of the house of the church is that of **beauty**. De Botton (2006) refers to early Christian theologians' perspectives on the relationship between divinity and beauty in architecture, that being that we might better understand God through beauty, since it was God who created every beautiful thing in the world. "In contact with attractive buildings, we could intimate some of the refinement, intelligence, kindness and harmony of their ultimate maker" (p. 117). They also speculated that "it might be easier to become a faithful servant of God by *looking* than by *reading*." "Because we were creatures of sense, spiritual principles stood a better chance of fortifying our souls if we took them in via our eyes rather than via our intellect … Spending time in beautiful spaces, far from a self-indulgent luxury, was deemed to lie at the core of the quest to become an honourable person" (p. 118). The architect Alexander (CBC, 2003b) would strongly underscore the importance of beauty in architecture, for which he developed an "alphabet" of fifteen properties that contribute to the inner coherence and beauty of the built environment.

While the children I interviewed did not attempt to define beauty, many of them referred to it. For most of them, beauty in a church building was overtly represented by

stained glass windows. Considering the relative simplicity of the church structures in the study, this is not surprising. To me, it was apparent that beauty was of some importance to the children. Again, Denys' emotional description of his childhood memories of church spoke strongly:

> *I **never** got tired or bored of looking around at the insides of the church – it was so **beautiful** – the arches, the seats, mahogany and gold, the organ pipes. Everything was so **beautiful**.* (his emphasis)

While Denys' life has been marked by suffering and difficulty with addictions, his memories of his experiences in church as a young boy have continued to provide a touchstone of hope to which he can turn even in dark times. I wonder if the beauty of the building conveyed a sense of a divinely-created beauty and goodness that sustained him through ugliness and pain.

Giles (2004) argued strenuously for the importance of aesthetics in the church's mission, and decries the negative message many older churches proclaim. "To those who come fresh to an experience of worship however, or to those who have caught a vision of just how stimulating and beautiful liturgical space can be when we let go, these tired old interiors can appear at best sad and pathetic, at worst an affront to God" (p. 107). In light of the children's responses to the only artistic element in the churches they attended, the notion of beauty in the house of the church merits further study, and is an area I would like to explore specifically in relation to children.

Chapter Summary

Using the four lifeworld existentials of relationality, corporeality, temporality and spatiality as a framework, I have explored children's lived experiences of the constructed environment of the church within a particular tradition of Protestant Christianity in

Maritime Canada and within a particular architectural tradition as presented in Chapter III. The variety of the children's experiences reflected the individuality and variety that is constitutive of human experience in general. While it was often a challenge to elicit detailed responses from the children, the interviews, observations and artwork provided a rich mine of data.

Without universalising the responses, certain themes within each lifeworld existential did emerge. Habituation or being at home in the house of the church emerged as a salient feature of relationality. In this particular research group, most of the interviewees expressed a strong sense of belonging which I suggest is indicative of the relatively small size of the churches represented. Exploring corporeality through the five physical senses yielded a multi-hued canvas. Temperature, comfortable seating, space for moving, food, distinctive smells, music, church bells, light and stained-glass windows created vivid and lasting memory pictures of the house of the church and of the communal life within it. Lived time or temporality (both chronos and kairos time) was experienced as outside of the everyday routine, although there were limited opportunities for kairos experiences which I suggest would be significant for spiritual formation. The lifeworld of spatiality actually encompasses the entire scope of the research since it is children's responses to life as it happens in the space and place of the church. I chose, therefore, to focus on those elements of the space that related to religious meaning, such as aesthetics, size, light and symbols. It became evident that children responded strongly to these qualities and were sensitive to beauty (as they defined it) and light and to the images and symbols around them.

In closing, I looked at the children's experiences in relation to the Webber-Barrie rubric on worship space as developed in Chapter III. It was evident that the churches included in the study did not meet all of the spatial criteria for worship/sacred space as determined by Webber and Barrie. There was strong evidence that the churches conveyed hospitality and participation in both overt and symbolic ways. However, the quality of mystery, to which Webber gives precedence, was ambiguously represented. The children did appear to experience the mystery of God's immanence in the houses of the church, but the mystery of transcendence appeared to be lacking. The work of Hay and Nye would suggest that this area of church life merits further consideration.

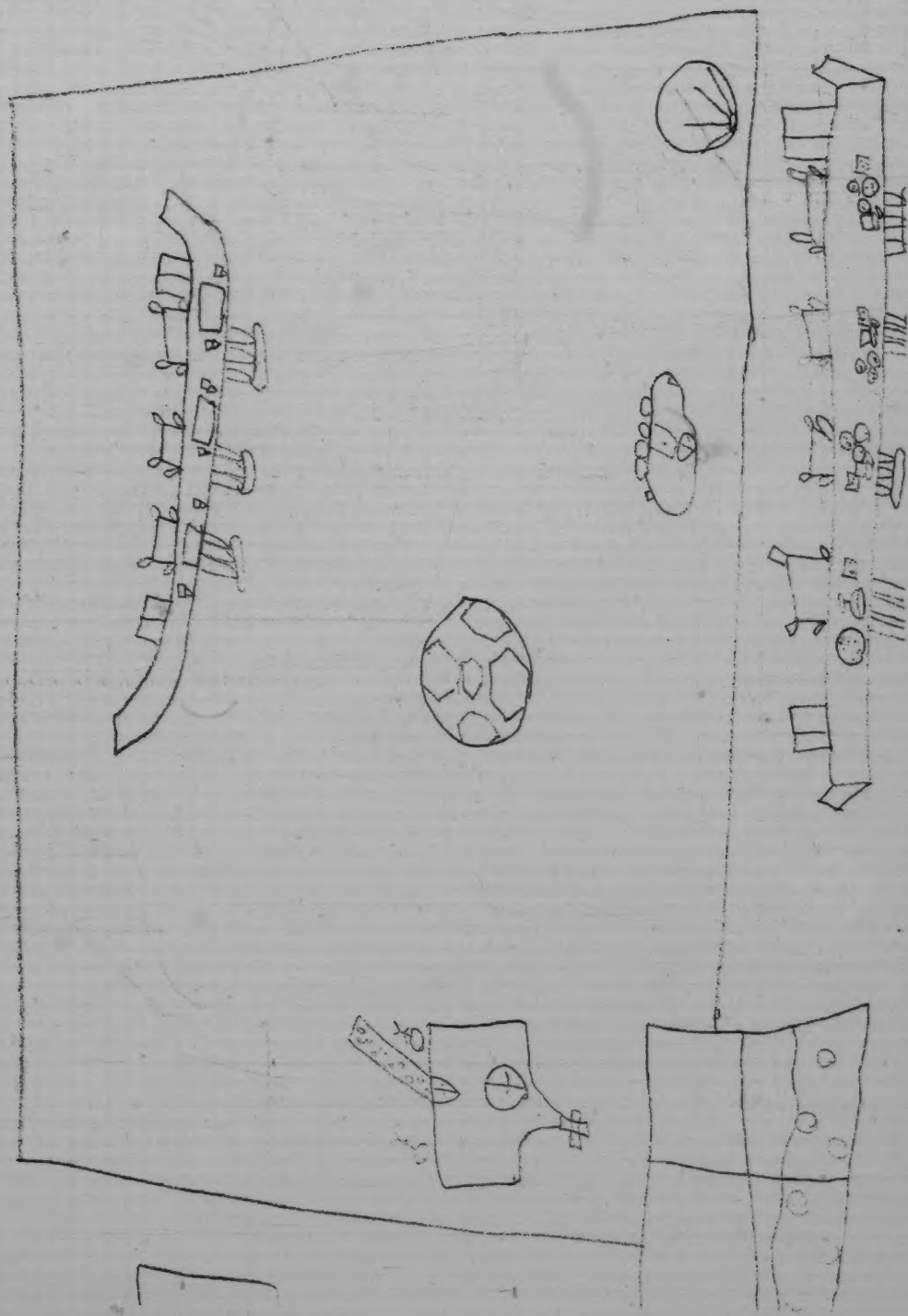

Figure 5: Church by Claire, age 9

Figure 6: Church by Adrienne, age 5

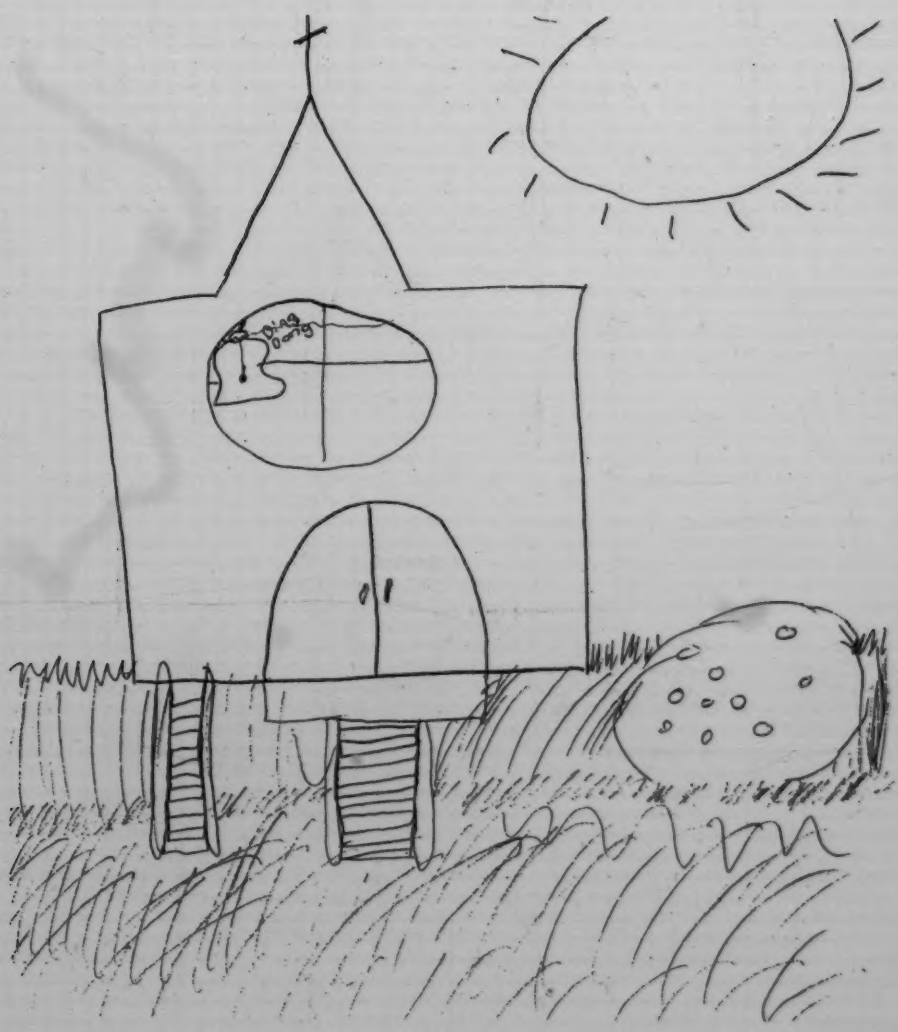

Figure 7: Church by Claire, age 9

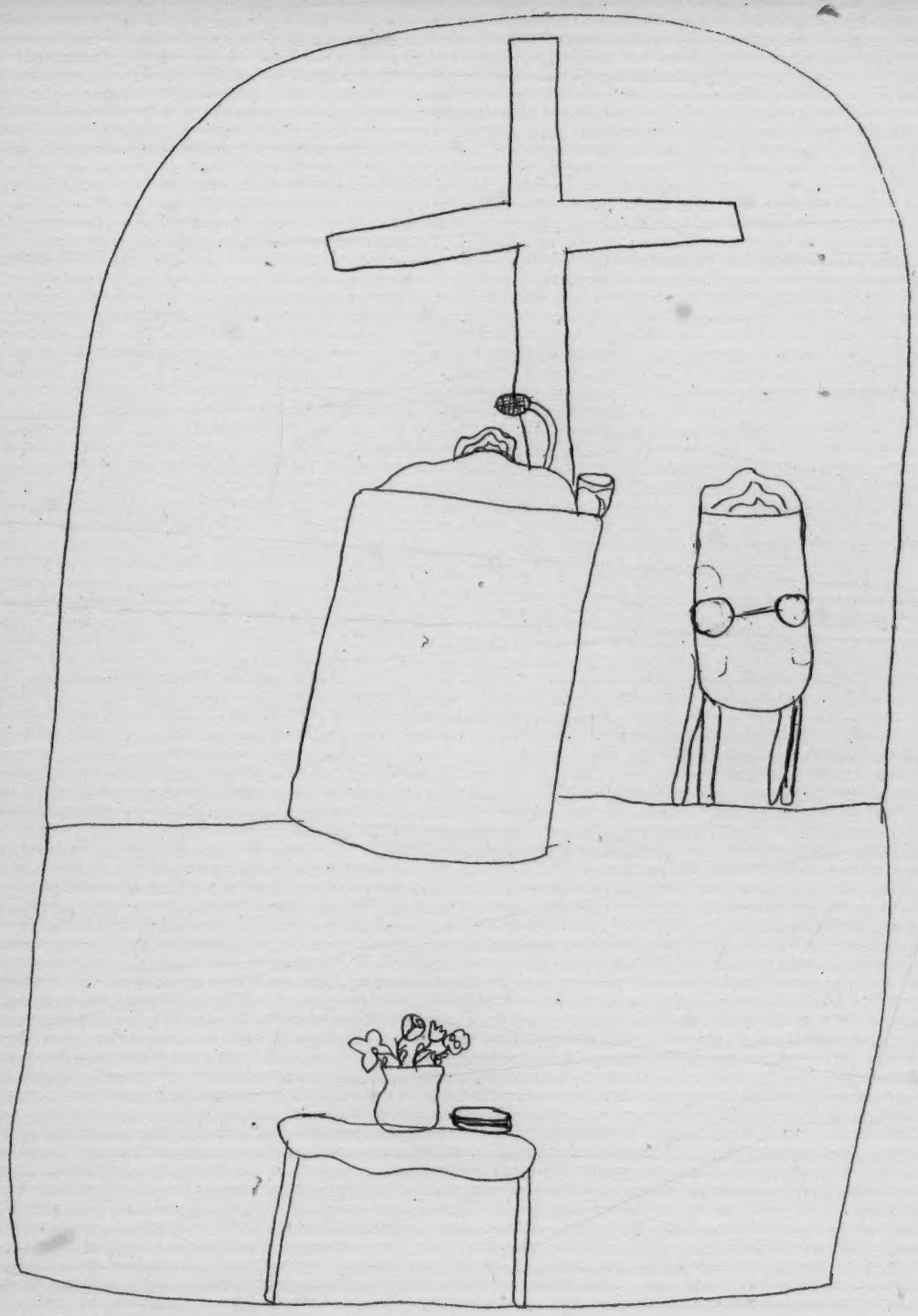

Figure 8: Church by Caitlyn, age 9

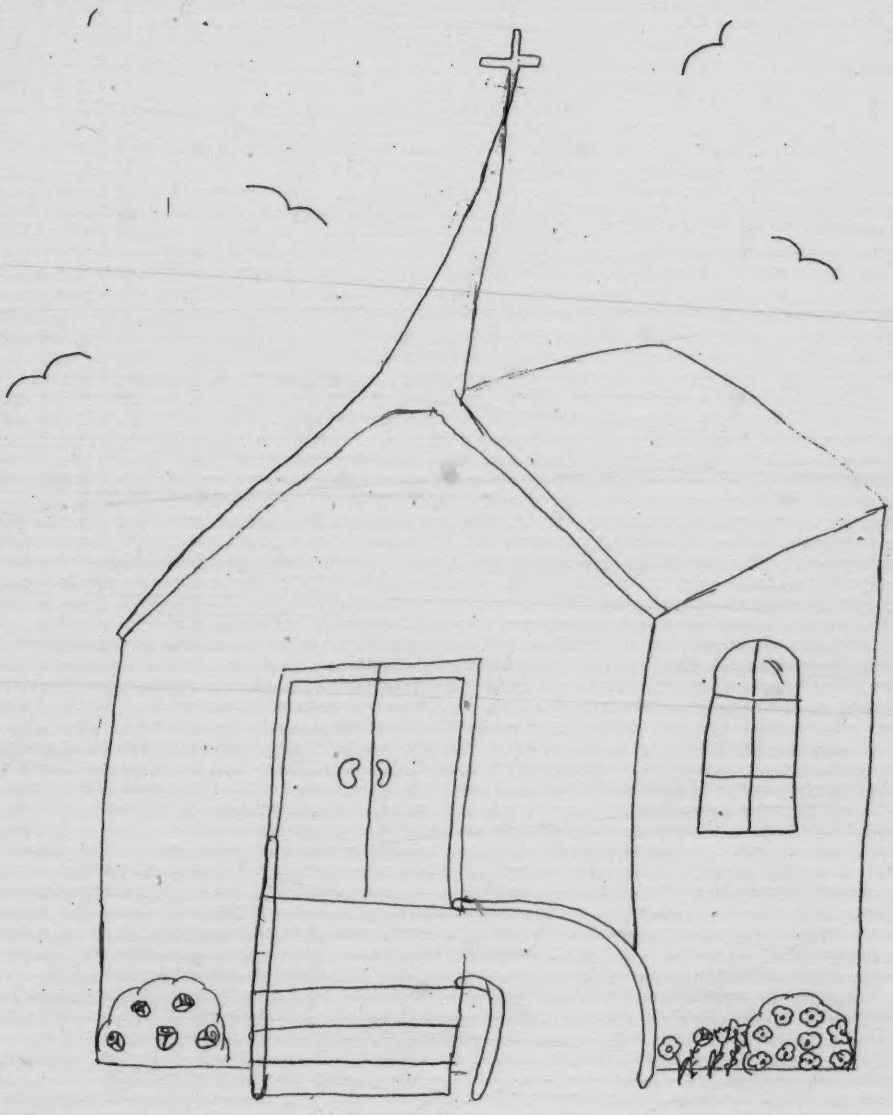

Figure 9: Church by Jason, age 9

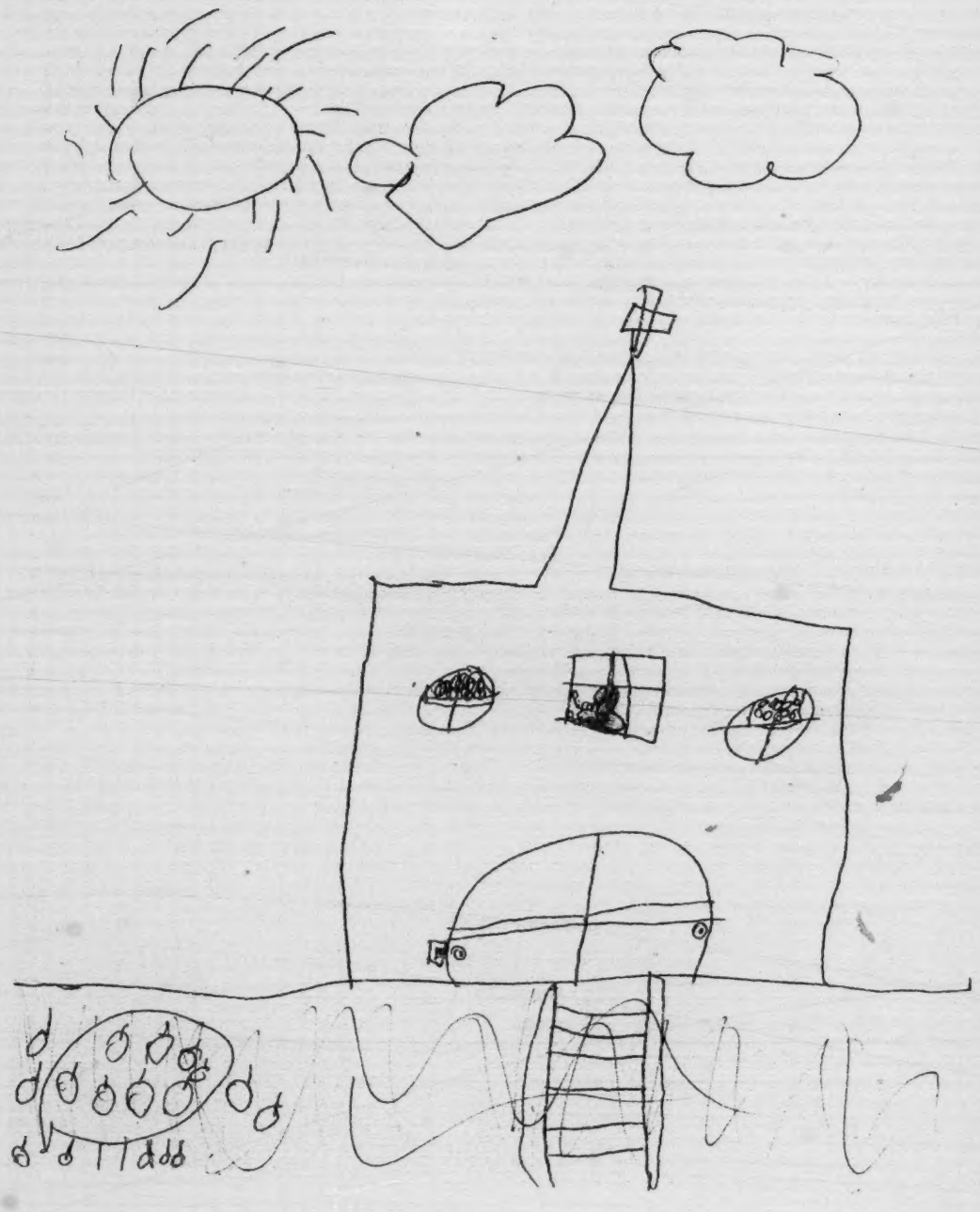

Figure 10: Church by Faye, age 7

CHAPTER VI: CLOSING REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS

The initial impetus for this research study arose from my personal interest in sacred architecture and from my concern with contemporary developments in church building. Professionally, as I read deeply in the area of children's spirituality and worked with children in a religious setting, I became more convinced of the formative nature of the early years for their life-long spiritual health and development. For some time, these two interests existed independently of each other until I began to think intentionally about a possible research topic. In my passion to understand more fully the various influences on the lives of children, I decided to explore one area of the physical environment that related to children's religious lives and to my personal interest – the house of the church – that had received little or no attention from either scholars or the religious community.

However, as I began my own research, through the literature but more significantly with children themselves, a subtle shift in emphasis began to take place. Instead of a model in which the building stood as subject and the child as object, the child began to emerge as an autonomous, active agent. Each child emerged so distinctly as an individual that the built environment began to take on the aspect of a stage for her. The flow of this dissertation represents in a visible way the development of my own growing awareness: from an exploration of the physical place and space to a theoretical consideration of the child's spiritual condition to engagement with the children (and recalled childhoods). In the end, it is the child who speaks most distinctly.

The pedagogical literature speaks strongly of the importance of place and space in the lifeworlds of children (Ellis, 2002, 2004). Literature in the field of religion speaks

equally strongly about the influence of sacred place and space (Eliade, 1959; Barrie, 1996; Inge, 2003). For those children who are engaged in religious activities (a substantial number in Canada, as the statistics indicate), the physical setting for those activities merited exploration. In a modest way, I have attempted to heighten awareness of children's everyday (in the figurative sense) experiences of the architecture of the place and space called 'church.' I have chosen a very small slice of Christian practice in small-town and rural Nova Scotia. Without in any way claiming to universalise their responses, I nevertheless hope that each child's unique experience will give us a glimpse of what is constitutive of the human experience and, in doing so, contribute to interhuman understanding.

In his monograph on Heidegger's hut, Sharr (2006) references Heidegger's writings on 'dwelling' and 'place' that emphasise a living and making "in which the small places of life and the activities they support are deeply entwined" (p. 104).[7] His hut was more attuned to "emotion and experience" than his suburban house which was more bound up with the conventional domestic and social properties of daily living. As Heidegger's hut was "a centering power for the philosopher's life" (p. 112), I wonder if the house of the church can provide that kind of centring power for her children today – not as an escape from reality, but as a way to engage with reality more deeply and in a more sustaining manner. Might it provide a respite from the "rushes of thin, restless activities" (Jardine, LaGrange and Everest, 1998) in which so many are swept up? Might this place provide the space in which children experience a deep connection to the source

[7] I am aware of the troubling association of Heidegger with Nazism and the ethical issues this raises in citing him in a positive manner in a study of sacred place and space. While acknowledging my unease, I submit that his writing on dwelling and place has informed much subsequent thinking on the topic and his concepts provide useful philosophical tools. Sharr's reflections on emotion and experience in relation to architectural space have been helpful to me.

of all life? I saw evidence of that in Isabelle's life, as she found space within the holy hush of the church an opportunity to pray, to reflect, to sort out childhood's relationships and directions, and to draw on a sustaining power for her life.

Sharr asks the evocative question, "Why cannot every life hold out hope for a resonant, centering datum?" (p. 112). To paraphrase him, the house of the church might frame in rich and multiple ways itself, its children and their relationships, its furnishings and its social and religious contexts. It might be sim[redacted] and warm enough to allow small children to feel at home but light-filled and beautiful enough to evoke the Creator. Its interior might say to those who enter, "Hush, this is a holy place, a sacred place .... When you come, come softly, walk softly, talk softly" (Yolen, 1996, p. 9), inviting meditative reflection even by the young. Through symbol and metaphor it might allude to the mystery of the One who is transcendent and unknowable but imminent and close as breath. This place and the space within it might facilitate relationships that are nurturing and life-sustaining, encouraging an irenic and ethical community that can be nurtured into concern for relationships with the wider community.

Inge (2003) asserts that "attention to place by the Christian community will afford great nourishment and sustenance to it" (p. 137). Giles (2004) reiterates the importance of attending to place, "When we come to the environment of worship, we should never underestimate the influence of our building upon the way we think about God, about each other, and about the relevant importance of the activity we have come together to engage in" (p. 57). The house of the church is not an inert or neutral structure – it can speak gently or stridently, warmly or coldly, graciously or disapprovingly. The children whom I interviewed generally expressed positive experiences (Were they only trying to please

me?), but we can be sure that not all children would have had good experiences or memories. An area for further research would be to explore the experiences of children from different Christian traditions and from other faith traditions, children with marginal exposure to the house of the church and children who have left the church.

Place and space are curriculum – explicit and hidden. Both the constructed place and the created space convey meaning and promote meaning-making. Inge declares that "churches have a sacred purpose of educating the faithful – but not *just* in terms of learning facts about the faith. Education operates at deeper levels than the didactic" (Inge, 2003, p. 117). As Robert Maguire warns, "If you are going to build a church you are going to create a thing which speaks. It will speak of meanings, and of values, and it will go on speaking. And if it speaks of the wrong values, it will go on destroying" (Inge, p. 103). My own theory and praxis is that the house of the church should speak of the nature of God which in turn should be translated into action within the particular community and engaging the wider community. As Tim Cresswell notes, "places force us to link ideas to actions almost constantly" (1996, p. 157). There should be a two-way interaction between what is experienced in the church and what is experienced in the world. In my view this interaction comprises the ethical implications of the relational component of the children's experiences. The question arising from this understanding is "Does the house of the church foster loving and caring relationships which can be nurtured into an ethical concern for relationships with the wider community?"

Healthy relationships are based on a healthy sense of personal identity. As children interact physically, emotionally and cognitively with the house of the church, they begin to find their place in it, and to build their identity within its community. This

place becomes part of the conversation between children and their lifeworld that contributes to their being (*Dasein*). David Hay, who has done so much work in children's spirituality, claims that "relational consciousness is a biologically in-built constituent of what it is to be human" (Hay & Nye, 1998, p. 155). While spirituality *per se* cannot be taught, the church can create a physical environment which fosters and validates the spiritual experiences that are important to children's faith experiences and facilitates the faith qualities that are important to the faith community.

I remain deeply concerned about the affective component of children's religious lives within the house of the church. In spite of my most gentle, but persistent, efforts to elicit their felt experiences, it was often difficult to get beyond the Cartesian response of what they *thought* or *believed* about things. I wonder if this habit is so ingrained in them both at school and at church (where they are frequently asked what they *know*) that they find it difficult to respond in any other mode. Considering the intimate connection between the emotional and the spiritual indicated by recent neurobiological studies, this tendency is a matter for concern. I noticed the seeds of spiritual response in children I interviewed and observed, but have also noted (during my years of experience with children's education in the church) that the seeds are often neglected; the emphasis in much Christian religious education is on orthodox knowing and doing to the detriment of the tender heart and spirit of the child.

In the end, Rodin's sculpture proved to be a remarkably apt metaphor for this study. Entitled "Cathedral," it comprised two right hands stretching up but enclosing a dynamic space between them (see Introduction). This beautiful shape, evoking a humanly created place that celebrated both human-divine relationship and interhuman

relationships, became for me a powerful visual symbol of what the house of the church should and could be for all people. In surprising and wonderful ways, the interviews revealed that the built environment of the church was experienced by numbers of children as uplifting and embracing hands.

My hope is that the study I have undertaken will equip me to contribute in a more informed way to the conversation concerning children's spiritual nurture in the house of the church. To this end, I anticipate using the children's own eloquence demonstrated through the interviews to draw adult attention to the children's lived experiences of religious space. The desired outcome would be a genuine and deepened adult respect for children's perspectives in all things spiritual that would prompt adults to elicit children's viewpoints, expressions and reflections in matters that affected children's lives. I hope that my own experience with interviewing and studying children would inform further work with children both in professional and voluntary settings.

In regard to my interest in sacred architecture and its relation to children's lives, I look forward to using this study to build a greater awareness in my constituency of the influence of the constructed environment. As churches continue to build and renovate houses for worship and religious education, both the literature and the children's voices revealed in these pages have something to say. A heightened sensitivity to the design of the house of the church, even in modest settings, would be a worthwhile outcome.

The last word should remain with the children. *Okay, when I go there, I feel all happy and excited. I get to go there only on Sunday. There's all kinds of love. No one can hurt me. It's really safe* (Jason, age 9). Nine-year-old Cassie says her favourite space is

the sanctuary – it's nice to be around all the people and to hear the piano playing. And eleven-year-old Gavin exclaims as he shares his final thoughts *Go to church! It's worth it!*

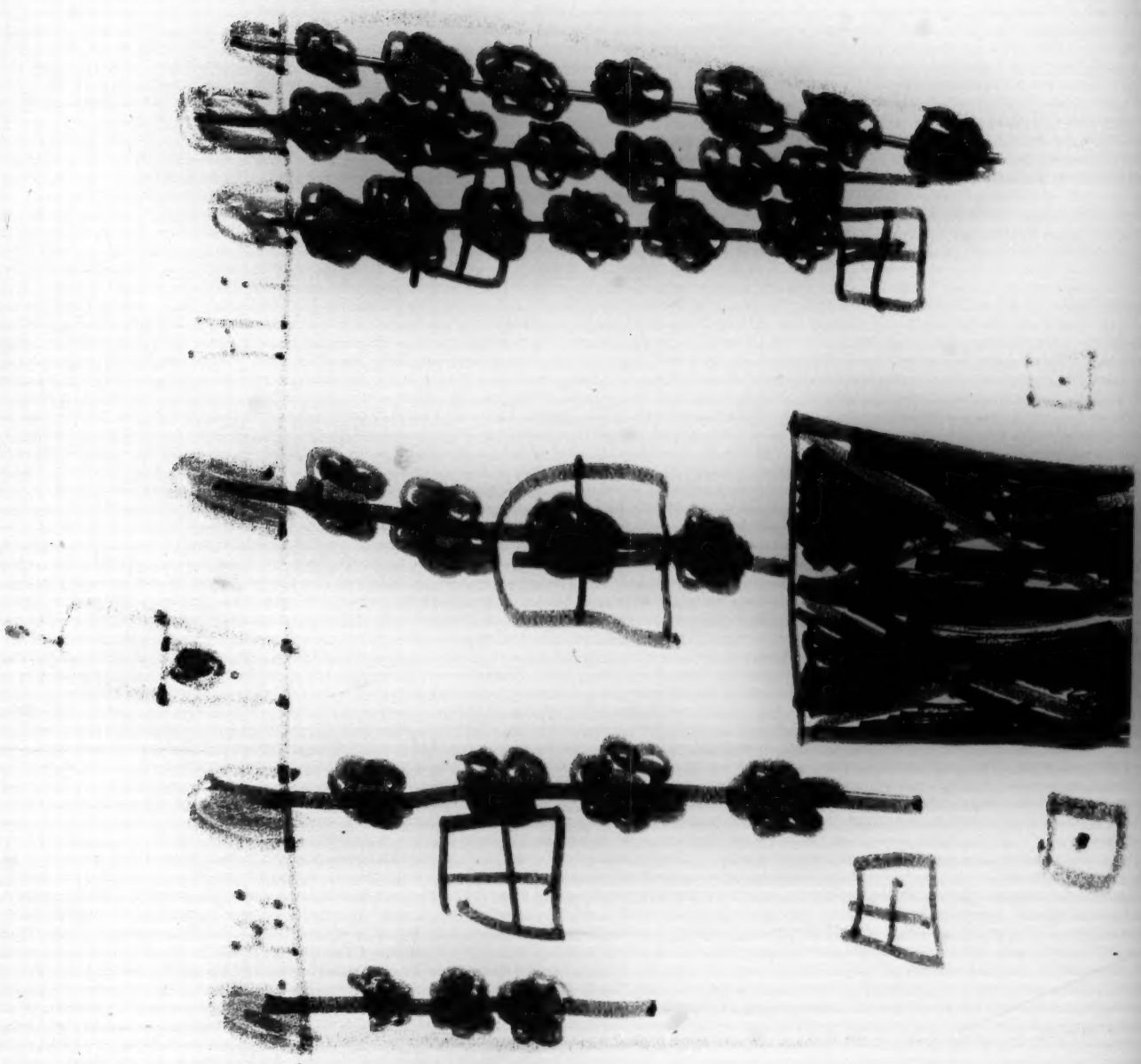

Figure 3: Church by Shannon, age 8

church

I like church.
Do you like
church?
you sing!
you learn
and more importantly
YOU
have
fun!!!

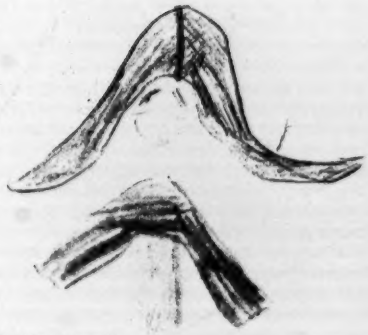

Figure 12: Church by Addison, age 8

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APPENDIX: SOME CURRENT THEORIES OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

CHILDHOOD	PSYCHOSOCIAL Erikson	COGNITIVE Piaget	MORAL (JUSTICE) Kohlberg	FAITH Fowler	SELF Kegan
			PRECONVENTIONAL		
	1) Trust/Mistrust, Hope	Sensorimotor (0-2 years)	0) Amoral	1) Undifferentiated (0-2 years)	0) Incorporative
	2) Autonomy/Shame, Doubt				
	3) Initiative/Guilt, Purpose	Preoperational (2-7 years)	1) Punishment-Obedience	2) Intuitive-Projective (2-6 years)	1) Impulsive
	4) Industry/Inferiority, Competence	Concrete (7-11 years)		3) Mythic-Literal (7-11 years)	2) Imperial
ADOLESCENCE			CONVENTIONAL		
	5) Identity/Confusion, Fidelity	Early Formal (11-15 years)	3) Interpersonal Concordance	4) Synthetic-Conventional (12-22 years)	3) Interpersonal
		Full Formal	4) Authority-Social Order		4) Institutional
ADULTHOOD			POSTCONVENTIONAL 4.5) Relativist		
				5) Individuative-Reflective (Young Adulthood)	
	6) Intimacy/Isolation, Love		5) Social Contract		5) Interindividual
		Contextual-Dialectic			
				6) Conjunctive (Middle Adulthood)	
	7) Generativity/Stagnation, Care				
			6) Universal Principles		
	8) Integrity/Despair, Wisdom			7) Universalizing (Late Adulthood)	

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